

THE TESTAMENT OF JOAD.

by the same author

---

*Guide to Modern Thought*

*Return to Philosophy*

*The Book of Joad*

*Guide to Modern Wickedness*

*Journey Through the War Mind*

*God and Evil*

*Pieces of Mind*

*The Adventures of the Young Soldier in*

*Search of the Better World*



C. E. M. JOAD

---

*The Testament of*  
JOAD



FABER AND FABER LTD  
24 Russell Square  
London

*First published in Mcmxxvii  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square London W.C.1*

*Reprinted in this edition*

*September Mcmxxxix*

*August Mcmxli*

*June Mcmxlii*

*Mcmxliii and Mcmxliv*

*Printed in Great Britain by*

*Latimer Trend & Co Ltd Plymouth*

*All rights reserved*

52.25

*This book is produced in complete conformity  
with the authorized economy standards*

## CONTENTS

Introduction page 7

### PART I. SPIRITUAL VAGRANCY

I. The Need	17
II. The Chinese Provide for It	24
III. Rural Counterfeits of Spiritual Vagrancy	32
IV. Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy	39
V. The Vagrant and Society	52

### PART II. BELIEFS, ILLNESS AND FRIENDS OF THE AUTHOR

VI. Pain, Death, and the Goodness of God	64
VII. Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others	72

### PART III. HE COMPLAINS OF CIVILIZATION

VIII. Deus ex Machina	108
IX. The Snare of the Country and the Character of the Author	128
X. The Starved Hand	145

### PART IV. HE SCOLDS THE CIVILIZED

XI. Women, Tastes, and Food of the English	151
XII. The Cruelty of Women and Some Men	175
XIII. The Lunacy of My Contemporaries	191

*Contents*

**PART V. THE AUTHOR IS MOVED BY AND  
REFLECTS UPON BEAUTY**

XIV. A Batch of Beauties	<i>page</i> 202
i. Christians into Motorists	
ii. Opera at Glyndebourne	
iii. Nostalgia for Oxford	
XV. The Chinese Exhibition	223

**PART VI**

XVI. The Author has Hope of the Future	245
--	-----

## INTRODUCTION

### *Nature and Occasion of Book*

The following book does not conform to any well-established mode. It is not a collection of essays; it does not present, except by implication, a sustained thesis; it is not a book of impressions; it is not history, philosophy, sociology, or politics, and it is not strictly speaking autobiography. Yet it is with autobiography that its affinity is, I think, closest. Some slight experience of the author's is used as an occasion for the setting forth of the prejudices which he calls his ideas and displaying the idiosyncrasies which constitute what he regards as his individuality. I have mounted all my hobby horses that I may the better trot out all my fancies, and have done my best to ensure that the buzzing of the bees in my own bonnet shall extend itself into the ears of my readers.

Some years ago, I did in fact essay to write an autobiography.<sup>1</sup> It contained a slightly greater allowance of personal experience than the present volume; but even *The Book of Joad* was mainly devoted to discussion. I do not flatter myself that my life has been important, and I do not think that it has been unusual. Hence an autobiography of the 'I did this', 'I went there', 'I met her', 'I said to him' type would be as undistinguished as the life of its author. I have, however, a certain facility in the exposition of ideas. Like Aubrey in Shaw's play, *Too True to be Good*, I can explain anything to anybody, and I do in fact spend most of my life administering cooked versions of other people's ideas to those who are unable to swallow them in the raw. And this I do, not out of officiousness, but because I am paid to do it. Inevitably, there are times when I feel it to be a little unfair that I should always be going about other people's intellectual business. For I too have ideas, and I do not see why I should not indulge myself every now and then by enlisting in my own service an expository talent which must usually be devoted to that of other people. Thus from time to time I feel moved to write about myself and since, though I find my life fully worth living, I do not consider it at all

<sup>1</sup> *Under the Fifth Rib*, subsequently re-published as *The Book of Joad* (Faber Library).



## Introduction

worth describing, to write about myself means to explain what is going on in my mind.

### *Scolding*

Now the reader may very well object that explaining to the world what is going on in my mind seems uncommonly like giving the world a piece of my mind. The present book appears, indeed, at first sight to be a sustained scolding. Women are scolded because they cannot cook and because they wear furs obtained by the torture of animals. Men are scolded because they worship machines, identify the good life with the rapid alteration of the position in space of pieces of matter, and contemplate with inane equanimity the preparations which are visibly being made for painfully killing them in the next war<sup>1</sup>. Modern civilization is scolded because it is ugly, noisy and vulgar, maintains a schoolboy's interest in the way things work, persistently mistakes means for ends, and having inherited the loveliness of the English countryside, spends time and energy and labour in substituting for it the ugliness of the English suburb. I never go to the country without a lifting of the heart, never enter that dark canyon, running between cliffs of houses, which is the approach to Paddington station, without a lowering of it. Yet the country was there to begin with, not the houses; and we have had to go out of our way to destroy it, in order to put the houses in its place. Viewed objectively, it is an astonishing thing to have done. But I must not let the bees whose buzzing constitutes my book swarm into my Introduction. I only mention the matter here because I wish to make it clear that my scolding is not the outcome of a bad liver, a disgruntled temperament, an unhappy life or a frustrated ambition, that it is not, indeed, the expression of any sort of pessimism, but is, in fact, the outcome of a fundamental and persistent optimism.

### *The Author's Estimate of his Life*

On the whole, my life is as pleasant and prosperous, its occupations as varied and entertaining as those of most people. I mastered at an early age what I believed to be the secret of successful living, which is that happiness is to be found not in attainment, but in endeavour. My philosophy of life, a form of Vitalism owing much

<sup>1</sup> This was written in 1936. The killing now proceeds apace.—  
C.E.M.J., 1943.



## *Introduction*

to Samuel Butler and to Shaw<sup>1</sup>, tells me that the essential quality of life consists less in the attainment of goals than in their pursuit, so that a goal attained immediately gives way to a goal yet to be attained. Possession in fact is static, acquisition ecstatic. To complain that a life so conceived is all work and no play, continual striving and enjoyment ever deferred, is to misconceive the nature of life. For enjoyment lies in the very fact of striving. To yearn for finality is, therefore, to lack vitality. There is nothing at the end of any road better than may be found beside it, though there would be few to travel did men act in fact upon what I would have them realize in theory. In theory I agree with Hegel's celebrated epigram, 'The attainment of the infinite End just consists in preserving the illusion that there is an End to be attained.' Although, however, I know in theory that the pleasure I derive from pursuing X is a pleasure of pursuit, I find it best in practice to forget my theory and to concentrate directly on aiming at X. Ends, in fact, are the carrots that life dangles before our noses to induce us to make the efforts which are necessary to sharpen our faculties and enlarge our consciousnesses in the interests of the purpose for which it created us.

Now, so far as effort and endeavour are concerned, I consider myself to be fortunately placed. I do the work I like, I do it in pleasant conditions, and I think on the whole that it is worth doing. I have a pleasant house in the country and I have time enough and money enough to go there sufficiently often to be able to enjoy it. I have a good deal to say in the ensuing pages on the subject of the escape of the townsman into the country, and I hope that by the time he has reached the end of Chapter IX the reader will see why I attach importance to the point.

So far, then, as I am concerned, I have no great cause for complaint, and though I complain of my contemporaries I do so not because I despair of them but because I have hopes of them.

### *His Distinguishing Beliefs. (1) That People are Decent*

It is because I think that people can be shamed, that I go out of my way to scold them. It is because I think that in the end they will listen to reason, that I think it worth while to reason with them. This means that I hold two beliefs which, at one time embraced by most civilized people, are looked upon in the modern world as obsolete

<sup>1</sup> It isn't now.—C.E.M.J., 1943.

## *Introduction*

errors whose persistence entitles their holder to be regarded as a survived Victorian crank. I hold that people are fundamentally and on the whole reasonable, and I hold that they are fundamentally and on the whole decent<sup>1</sup>. If I am right in holding these beliefs, it follows that the ills from which the world suffers are due not so much to the hardness of men's hearts as to the thickness of their heads.

It is not so much because men are wicked as because they are stupid, that the world is as it is. The individual men and women that one meets are, it is obvious, not wicked. On the contrary, they are for the most part decent, kindly folk who do what they can to diminish human suffering and will often go to considerable lengths in the matter of personal inconvenience in order to assist those who are in trouble. Yet if one considers the affairs of mankind collectively and in the mass, if one takes, in short, a glance at human history, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that men are devils, or are at least intermittently animated by devils. For example, during a period of twenty-seven months from 1482 to 1484 two thousand males and females of the human species were burnt alive in public in the city of Seville by those who believed that by tormenting God's creatures for a short period in an earthly fire, they were saving them from an eternity of torment in an infernal one. In the Great War of 1914 to 1918 men killed ten million and mutilated twenty-three million of their number in the belief that by these actions they were defending national honour, safeguarding the rights of small nations, preserving democracies, protecting hearths, homes, kings, wives, children, and what not. The motives that led men to inflict these appalling sufferings upon one another were not evil. On the contrary, they were on balance good, entailing in those who were animated by them the virtues of self-sacrifice, loyalty, bravery, and devotion. But the beliefs which evoked the display of these virtues were almost certainly false. It is, for example, highly improbable that a good God enjoys the roasting of His creatures. It is not the case that democracy, kings, wives, and the rest were in fact protected by the methods adopted in war. Thus the reformer, who wishes to persuade people to take the steps which are necessary to increase their happiness, should not waste his time in trying to change men's hearts, but he should try to brighten their wits, so that their idealism may no longer be exploited by selfish interests which induce them to lay

<sup>1</sup> Not any longer.—C.E.M.J., 1943.

## Introduction

down their lives in the defence of what they falsely believe to be right and justice.

### (2) *That People are Rational*

Is this brightening of wits feasible? I think that it is. Just as I believe that people are fundamentally decent, though stupid, so I believe that they are fundamentally rational and, because rational, teachable. There are moods in which, looking back over human history one is tempted to take the view that men are incorrigible, that they will never learn. Justifiable in moments of irritation, this view cannot commend itself to serious reflection. Consider, for a moment, the evils that have disappeared from the lives of men. Witchcraft and cholera, slavery and gladiatorial games and torture.<sup>1</sup> Each of these evils must, at the time of its prevalence, have seemed, as war seems to-day, to be irremediable. Human nature being what it is, you could not, men must have said—men in fact did say—abolish slavery. But you did. How was the change effected? By appeals to men's sense of justice, to their compassion, above all to their reason. Now the efficacy of these appeals to reason depends upon the educability of mankind. If men are not teachable, if they cannot and will not learn, then it is no use appealing to their reason. But sometimes, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, it apparently is.

The situation in the Middle Ages in regard to plague was not unlike the contemporary situation in regard to war. The communities of Europe were swept by repeated pestilences which decimated the population. Just as men beset the statesmen of to-day and ask them how to cure war, so they flocked to the doctors of the fourteenth century and asked them how to cure plague. And just as the statesmen of to-day offer, when approached, an infinite variety of different and self-contradictory proposals, so that wherever there are seven statesmen gathered together there are there eight opinions, so did the doctors of the Middle Ages offer a bewildering miscellany of cures that were no cures. And because no doctor *knew* of any cure, each *professed to know* of a different cure. Perhaps the most popular of all the accredited methods of meeting the situation was the method of prayer. People crowded into the churches and prayed God to

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, as the recent history of Germany, Italy and Russia has shown, the disappearance of torture has been only temporary.

## *Introduction*

avert the pestilence, thereby providing the best possible conditions for the spread of contagion.

But though the doctors could not tell the people what to do to cure the plague, they could tell them what steps to take if they wished to avoid it. 'The position', they said in effect, 'is perfectly simple: If you wish to prevent plague, keep sewage out of your water.' And in due course, when they had suffered badly enough and long enough, suffered for several hundred years to the tune of several million lives, human beings saw the doctors' point, devised a system of sanitation and ceased to suffer from plagues. And the inference? That human beings really are teachable. If they are suffering from some palpable evil, and if you can show them how the evil may be prevented, then when the evil has continued long enough and they have suffered badly enough, provided that you have in no way relaxed your efforts at demonstration but have continued to entreat them, arguing the while patiently, cogently, and persuasively in favour of the means of prevention that lie to hand, you can in the end induce them to do what is necessary to save themselves. In the end men will always see the point; and in the end they will see the point of disarmament, if they wish to avoid war, as they saw the point of sanitation when they wished to avoid the plague. But it will take them a long time yet and they may have to suffer a great deal more in the process.

### *Why the Author Scolds*

Now it is because I believe that human beings are teachable, that I scold them as I do. I believe that what I have to say in the following pages, though sometimes angry and often eccentric, is on the whole right. In so far as I am dealing with theoretical matters, I believe that what I think is true, and, in so far as I am dealing with practical matters, I believe that the general adoption of my suggestions would make people happy. Because, then, I believe in the force of ideas whose foundations are rooted in objective fact, because I believe that in the long run power and authority go down before them, because I believe that men are rational and in the end will see the truth, if it is put often enough before them, and because I believe what follows to be on the whole true, I have proceeded to scold and bully and gibe and cajole and persuade and reason through the two hundred and fifty-six pages that you are going to read.

## *Introduction*

### *That Everybody should agree with the Author*

Like all reformers, I am totally unable to see why everybody does not agree with me. What I say seems to me so obvious as to be scarcely worth saying. Indeed, unless I were assured by bitter experience that most people will think it arrant nonsense, I should not be at the trouble of saying it at all. It has always been a puzzle to me that human beings should disagree as much as they do. As I read the thousand and one books in which philosophers and sages propound each their different solution of the riddle of the universe, politicians and economists each their different remedy for the ills of society, I confess to a schoolmasterish desire to set them lines and, in extreme cases of persistent disagreement, to spank them. I want to knock together the heads that they will not put together, chanting to the rhythm of the resounding skulls the refrain, 'Writers of the World, unite. You have nothing to lose but your brains.' For why, I ask myself, should we not agree? We all want the same things for ourselves, comfort, security, and freedom from economic anxiety, that we may be free to develop our personalities and realize all that we have it in us to be; and for the community we all want peace, prosperity, the abolition of poverty and a just distribution of material goods. Nor is it surprising that we should agree to want these things, for we are all human-beings together; our minds animate similar bodies; we are heirs to the same culture; we have inherited the same traditions; we have been educated to observe the same scales of values and we react to the same environment. It is natural, then, that we should want the same things, and, if I am right in thinking that there is no fundamental and incurable wickedness in human beings, if it is not fantastically optimistic in the light of their history to suppose them rational and teachable, there is no reason why we should not get a world without war, a world of material prosperity brought within reach of all, a world in which government has been reduced to an administrative mechanism for the transaction of the community's public business. Such a world I still believe to be achievable.

### *Obstacle to the Millennium*

What stands in the way? The chief obstacle, if I am right, is sheer, stark, staring stupidity. It is because we are stupid that we allow our lives to be governed by the false scales of values that I have



## *Introduction*

described in Part III, worshipping machines, busily moving pieces of matter in space, and thinking that we enjoy doing it. It is because we are stupid that we have built a civilization in which increasing numbers of us can only preserve our sanity by keeping open the somewhat devious roads of escape to the private lurking places and retreats that I have revealed in Part I. It is because of men's unimaginative stupidity that, as I have shown in Part IV, they inflict suffering upon harmless creatures that they do not see while pampering those that they do, and are letting their civilization drift to the verge of destruction in the next war.

### *The Sugar on the Remonstrative Pill*

That is why so many of the following pages are devoted to remonstrations. Taking incidents from my own recent experience I have used them as texts for my sermons to society. But since I do not wish to create the impression that everything is always wrong, and that I have nothing better to do than to complain, I have taken care to sugar my pills with some chapters on the beauty that there is in the world and the goodness. I have not hesitated to make a clean breast of my conviction that the presence of these qualities demands what previous ages would have called a religious interpretation of the Universe, although I must also confess to not knowing what manner of interpretation it should be.

In Part II, I have written of illness and of the subtle colouring which illness gives to the spectacles through which the sick man looks at the world. As a sick man, I meditated inevitably on such subjects as pain, death, evil, and the goodness of God. I give the results of these meditations and am proud to confess that I remained, at the end of my illness, the unregenerate agnostic that I was at the beginning, seeing good in the world, but seeing also much evil, and refusing in the interests either of cosmic unity or spiritual comfort to dissolve the latter in the mists of the former. I have also written of the sick man's friends and visitors and of his attitude to them; of the deterioration of his, that is of my, character; of the mystic who tried to make me see the inner purpose of my illness and of my obstinate inability to see it. If it be said that this disquisition on the experience and effects of illness lacks generality, possessing only a topical interest, I reply that I hope and believe that quite enough people are at different times ill to entitle me to regard the interest of



## Introduction

this Part as general. If they are not, I can only hope that they soon will be.

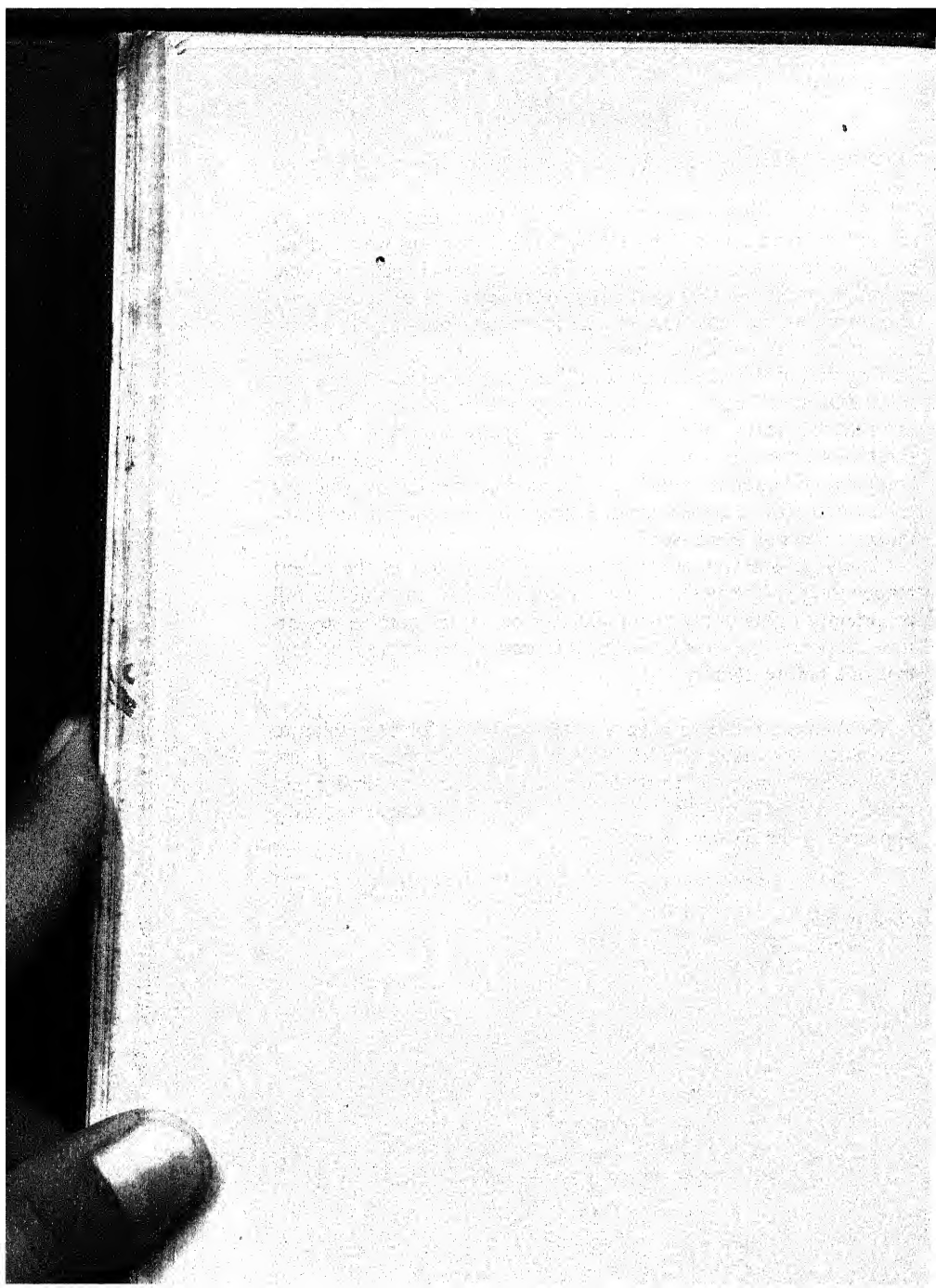
In Part V, I have written of the beauty that I find in nature, in art and in great music. I have also sought to show why I think beauty important. Concluding cheerfully, I have envisaged a possible extension of human faculty, a possible enlargement of human consciousness, as the next item on the immediate programme of the human race. But I cannot here resist the temptation of taking a parting shot at this civilization that I propose to scold, while at the same time sounding the opening note of the scolding, by pointing out that the beauty of nature is being rapidly destroyed, that the great music belongs to another century, and the great art to another continent and another civilization. I sometimes wonder by what our civilization will be remembered. Perhaps by the number and cantankerousness of its advisers!

Finally, as one who is living to see the prejudices of the parent reappearing as the poses of the children, I want to establish full proprietary rights in my own prejudices before the coming generation impounds them and, as its habit is, announces them as the dogmas of a new revelation.

My thanks are due to Messrs. Watts and Co., for permission to reproduce here Chapter VI, which originally appeared in the *Rationalist Annual*, and to Professor L. P. Jacks, for a similar permission in respect of Chapter XVI, a small part of which originally appeared in the *Hibbert Journal*.

C. E. M. JOAD

*Hampstead,*  
*November 1936*



*Part One*  
SPIRITUAL VAGRANCY

---

1  
THE NEED

---

*Ethical Bewilderment*

How ought I to live? What ought I to value? Which are the things that are really good? These questions, which express the typical worries of adolescence, generally cease to agitate the consciousness of middle age. It is not so much that they are answered—it is conceivable that they never are and never can be answered—as that the answering of them ceases to be important. Most middle-aged men pursuing careers, burdened by responsibilities, tied by wives and children to the trivial and the concrete, forget that they were ever questions. As they go about their lives, they have put together bit by bit a jerry-built structure of code and creed with which they make shift to get along as best they may; and in due course the structure hardens by habit into a rigid framework, a framework which is taken so completely for granted that its very existence ceases to be suspected.

To me this has not, I think, happened. Perhaps the profession of philosophy does after all have some effect upon the minds of those who pursue it, making them more painfully aware than other men of their ignorance and their guidelessness. Perhaps I have more curiosity, or perhaps it is merely that I am more dissatisfied with my life than the majority of my contemporaries. (Yet I do not in my heart believe that this last is the reason, for I enjoy my life well enough on the whole, and in spite of much doing of the things that I ought not to do and much leaving undone of the things that I ought to do, I am very well, thank you.) Whatever the cause, I am still concerned with the problem of conduct. How, I still want to know, ought I to live, what ought I to value, and which are the things that are really good? Nor have I yet entirely given up the hope of finding out.

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

### *Effect of a Book*

Hence the avidity with which I have recently devoured the pages of Mr. Lin Yutang's book, *My Country and My People*, the only work with which I am acquainted which gives a coherent and an intelligible account of Chinese life, Chinese philosophy, Chinese values and Chinese ideals. To those who are still interested in ideas, the book is indeed a godsend. As I have hinted elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the minds of middle-aged people are formed and set; they move but rarely and it takes a good big splash to start the ripples of thought. But for me at any rate Lin Yutang's book was a regular whale. Plump it splashed into the tank of my mind and all the little fishes of ideas which were drowsily feeding there were sent scurrying this way and that in a flurry of excitement. The resultant tumult has still to subside; let me try and explain the reasons for this agitation.

### *The Author a Disciple of the Greeks*

For the most part I have taken my ideals of life from the Greeks. It is my duty, I have held, to cultivate every side of my nature, to live out to the full stretch of my faculties, to develop to the best of my ability the talents with which I have been endowed. In the carrying out of this creed there was to be no favouritism; the body no less than the mind, the flesh equally with the spirit, was entitled to a square deal. Aldous Huxley has summed up this conception of good living in a passage which I cannot hope to better. 'The art of life consisted for them' (the Greeks) 'in giving every god his due. These dues were various. Thus, Apollo's due was very different from the debt a man owed to Dionysus. . . . But everyone was owed and, in its proper time and season, must be acknowledged. No god must be cheated and none overpaid.' A man's duty is, then, to acknowledge *all* the gods, to exclude none. In so far as we do our duty, we 'make the best of the world and its loveliness while we can—at any rate during the years of youth and strength.' The conception of the good life that emerges is clear enough. It consists in the exercise upon an appropriate subject matter of our highest talents screwed up to concert pitch interspersed with intervals of recreation in art, in Nature, in the pleasures of the senses and in the conversation of our friends. So much, at least, I have always believed. It is a good working creed, and even now I have little fault to find with it. But in

<sup>1</sup> See *The Book of Joad*, Chapter IV, p. 70.

## *The Need*

middle age it seems to me in certain respects to be lacking. It is, for example, from the point of view of the mid-twentieth-century man a little too self-regarding: it makes, that is to say, insufficient provision for the expression of a man's social self. I am very well aware that the Greeks defined man as a social and political animal, and held that the good life could only be realized in society. I know too that Plato even went so far as to assert that the better the society, the better, at least in theory, the life of the individuals who composed it. Not only am I aware of these facts, but I am paid to write and to lecture about them, and write and lecture I do unceasingly. But what was all very well for the citizens of a small City State has little enough application to the needs of a unit in a modern Ant-State. For what, after all, can the community mean to me? In peace-time I come across it on three occasions and three only—when I am required to pay taxes, to serve on juries, and to cast my vote. Nor, in spite of all that democrats have said about the elevating and developing effects of the suffrage, can I persuade myself that in performing these functions I am fulfilling my personality or living the good life. Admittedly the State impinges upon me in war-time. But I disapprove of war, and when it makes war, I regard the State as my enemy.

### *My Reformist Activities*

Admittedly, too, I am a reforming, proselytizing, propagandist sort of person, within whose bonnet the bees of a thousand lost causes are buzzing. I believe in birth control for all, easy divorce, the legitimization of abortion, National Parks and access to mountains and moorlands for walkers irrespective of the rights of property or the convenience of sportsmen; in prison reform, in the right to euthanasia and the right to suicide, in disarmament by example, in resistance to war by individuals, in Socialism, in the world state, in the abolition of motor-cars, and in a thousand and one other creeds and causes to the propagation of which I devote no small part of my available energy and enthusiasm. I have helped to found an organization known, formidably if cacophonously, as the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals; or, more precisely, having drawn up a programme by the simple process of making a list of all the creeds and causes in which I happened to believe, I have actually sought to bring together in an all-embracing Federation the thousand and one impotent societies who exist to advocate, the innumerable



## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

isolated individuals who endeavour to propagate, any one or more of them. But all this, although it provides me with entertainment and occupation, although it gives me opportunities for oratory and practice in the arts of managing men—not that I do manage them, by the way; sometimes, when they are sufficiently timid, I succeed in making them do what I want and they do not, but they always hate me for it and take the first opportunity that arises of going back on the courses in which they have been made so resentfully to acquiesce—all this, I fear, does not constitute that fulfilment of the personality in social relations of which the Greeks so admiringly wrote.

For one thing, it is from an instinct of opposition rather than of co-operation that these contacts of mine with society take their rise. I do not, that is to say, harmoniously co-operate with my fellow citizens in the pursuit of ends to which we jointly subscribe. I endeavour to impose upon them ends whose value they seem to me to ignore. For the most part, then, this playing at politics consists in seizing opportunities for giving the world a piece of my mind and in telling my contemporaries how to behave; valuable activities no doubt, but I cannot help feeling that when sadism, exhibitionism and sheer bombinating self-assertiveness have been weeded out of them, there is not much left of that harmonious co-operation with one's fellows in the pursuit of a common good to which the Greeks looked for the fulfilment of the personalities of those who were by definition political and social beings. Nor, indeed, is such happy and harmonious activity possible for a middle-aged liberal in the world of the 1930's.

### *Former Objections to the Family*

Secondly, there is the matter of the family, of which the Greeks took no account, or very little. Until recently I agreed with them. Yet of recent years I have been led to wonder whether in the Ant-State of the mid-twentieth century, it is not to the family bloc that one must increasingly look for the fulfilment of the social elements in one's nature? For most of my life I have been an opponent of the family. I was, for example, a bad son who asked perpetually why he should be expected to love and honour any chance couple of persons, merely because in the pursuance of the satisfaction of their desires they had happened to produce him. My existence was, I felt, the price of their pleasure, which I was called upon to defray, and though



## The Need

I had no choice but to defray it, I could not for the life of me see why I should feel gratitude to them for not only saddling me with this unasked burden, but gratuitously bringing me into existence to bear it.

Why, in any event, I asked, should one be expected to feel an automatic affection for one's parents? After all, one does not love—there is a reasonable probability that one may not even like—the average specimen of one's race, and there seems no necessary reason why any chance pair of persons, two pebbles picked up at random from the beach of humanity, should excite the affection of one's mind merely because they happen to have built the structure of one's body. If this were true of parents, how much more true of the relays of uncles and aunts who from time to time descended upon one unasked from the blue, expecting an equally automatic if less concentrated affection, and apt to display pique if they did not receive it? A bad son, and a bad nephew, I have also been a bad husband. A varietist by nature, I have liked women too much to pay them the poor compliment of cold shouldering all for the sake of one. One does not, after all, demonstrate one's taste as an epicure by dining solely upon roast beef, nor the subtlety and refinement of one's appreciation of music by consenting to listen only to the works of Beethoven. Besides I get so dreadfully bored with the same person. Even though she move with the grace of Diana and possess the beauty of Venus, the intelligence of Athena and the tongues of angels, by the time I have lived year in with her and year out, I would gladly exchange her for somebody else with half her wits and a quarter of her looks. A nice bright little home to *leave*, has been my conception of the ideal marriage. But women have usually seemed to want something different! No, I have found marriage difficult, very difficult indeed.

### *Later Revision of Early Hostility to Family*

A bad son, a bad nephew, a bad husband, I have been, nevertheless, a good father. It amuses me to be the head of a family, and, as my daughters grow up, to see the whole business of sex as it were through the other end of the opera glasses. Whether, as I like to believe, it is a fact that I do, indeed, make a good job of being a father, or whether it is that the family is all very well for those who are at the head of it, or whether it is merely the onset of middle age, I have in recent years changed my opinion, and begin to see some value in the family. There is value, as it now seems to me, in being

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

a member of a solid little social bloc, wherein one may sit, as it were, in one's spiritual shirt sleeves and relax. There is a certain ease in being a member of a society in which one can take things for granted and be taken oneself for granted; and there is comfort in the assurance of belonging to a group of people who, however much one may bicker with them in private, may nevertheless be relied upon to give one their unhesitating support in public. In the family, with luck, one has this assurance, for, however much it may be divided within itself, the family will nevertheless present a united front to the world. Very comforting and pleasant to have the benefit of that united front, especially if you are a vagrant intellectual at odds with the community on almost every controversial question of the day, and permanently on guard to meet the challenge of those to whom your opinions appear a danger and your existence a disaster. Now the Greek ideal makes little or no provision for this particular way of fulfilling one's social self. Families, of course, existed in Greece as elsewhere, and the early Greeks set store by them. But the sophisticated Athenians of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., whom I chiefly admire, rarely mentioned them. They did not, it seems, relax in the society of their women and children, or, if they did, they took good care to say nothing about it.

### *Introduction of Concept of Spiritual Vagrancy*

There is a further respect in which the ideals of Greek philosophy seem to me defective. They make little or no provision for spiritual vagrancy. Society, said Schopenhauer, is like a collection of hedgehogs driven together for the sake of warmth. So huddled, the hedgehogs will, it is obvious, prick one another, unless care is taken to put felt upon their spikes. Hence arise manners and morals. Manners and morals are no doubt necessary, but from their very nature they involve a certain 'felting', a certain muffling and stiffing of the proclivities of the natural, unregenerate man. Living in society is a process which demands what Freud calls a continual 'instinctual renunciation'. It involves, that is to say, a continual frustration of instinct. If I were to make love to every pretty woman who attracted me, broke the furniture whenever I felt annoyed, or bashed in the face of every gum-chewing smoker of cheap Virginia cigarettes—a thing which I often itch to do—and if everybody acted likewise according to *their* natural itches and dispositions, civilized society

## *The Need*

would become impossible. Inevitably, then, if we are to live in society, we must learn to accommodate ourselves within the pattern of behaviour which society prescribes. In childhood we suffer; in youth we kick against the pricks; but by the time we reach maturity the accommodation is more or less successfully achieved. In middle age it becomes unconscious. No longer are we aware that our ordinary everyday existence involves, as the psycho-analysts tell us that it does, the continual curbing of our instincts, the continual thwarting of our inclinations. But it does curb, it does thwart, none the less, and every now and then the so continuously curbed, the so ruthlessly thwarted unconscious explodes, and, like an underground prisoner forcing himself suddenly to the surface, breaks in upon our adult respectability with savage imprecations and dark atavistic lusts. Then there is a scandal, and old gentlemen of eminence and blameless lives accost pure women in the parks, or take an undesirable interest in the underclothes of little girls in trams. How are these outbreaks to be avoided?

The method I have found most effective is to make deliberate provision for their harmless, trivial occurrence, thus appeasing the wrath of thwarted instinct by allowing its accumulations continually to dribble away, as the engine-driver keeps under a head of steam by drawing it off through a safety-valve. How, asked Samuel Butler, is one to guard oneself against that most universal of human proclivities, the straining at gnats accompanied by the swallowing of camels? And answered, by deliberately and conscientiously swallowing a few gnats every day for one's soul's good—in communicating which advice he incidentally splits an enormous infinitive. Samuel Butler, I hold, is right, and I deduce, therefore, the need to provide outlets for what I propose to call my spiritual vagrancy, if my soul is to be kept in health. It is not merely that I must be allowed to sow a few bodily wild oats in youth; I must sow occasional spiritual ones as well, flirting with strange creeds and cults, dabbling in mysticism, and the occult, indulging in daydreams and fantasies, forgetting my obligations and responsibilities, falling foolishly in love and 'going native' in the country; and especially must I do these things in middle age. Now the Greeks, perhaps because the pressure of life bore less hardly upon them than upon ourselves, made little or no provision for this need. Not so the Chinese, which brings me back to *My Country and My People*.

## THE CHINESE PROVIDE FOR IT

*Confucianism as the Lubricant of Society*

From Lin Yutang's book I learnt for the first time of the two systems of philosophy that have dominated Chinese life, the philosophy of Confucianism and the philosophy of Lao-Tse. The first is a philosophy for everyday life. It performs with an elaborate perfection unmatched among any other people that 'felting' of the spikes of individual idiosyncrasy, which is necessary, if men are to live happily in a community. The Confucian conception of society is hierarchic. Every man has his place and his status, and his place and his status determine the pattern of his life. From his entry into the world Confucianism enmeshes him in a network of duties and exposes him to the continual pressure of social obligation. He has a duty to his ancestors, a duty to his parents, a duty to his family, a duty to his superior official. But these duties are not undertaken for their own sake; they have a purpose beyond themselves. They have been devised with the object of conferring the maximum quantity of contentment upon the individual members of the society which performs them. Confucianism is the most realistic of philosophies. Having devoted considerable attention to the task of finding out what men want, it proposes to give it to them. In order that it may succeed in this laudable object, it must abjure heroics and set its ideals low. How low by Western standards, may be judged from the answer which it suggests to a question recently set in an examination paper for Chinese students: 'When the philosopher Mo-Ti taught that war was wicked, Chinese soldiers laid down their arms. The same doctrine is taught by the Christian churches but has not had the same effect in the Christian countries. Explain this difference.' The Confucian reason for the difference is given by Mr. Lin Yutang in *My Country and My People*.

*The Meaning of Life*

In a chapter on 'Ideals of Life', Lin Yutang points out that, while

## *The Chinese Provide for It*

the philosophers of other countries and civilizations have found the end of life in this thing or in that, contending that it is Nirvana, mortification of the flesh, salvation of the soul, communion with God, the knowledge and love of the Trinity, unlimited supplies of women and drink in a Mahomedan heaven, or unlimited harp-playing and singing in a Christian one, power, wealth, virtue, honour, fame and whatnot, and while their followers have fought, tortured, mutilated and killed one another in their enthusiasm for some one or other of these alleged ends and their repugnance for all the others, the Chinese alone have discovered what the end of life in fact is. 'It lies', Lin Yutang tells us, 'in the enjoyment of a simple life, especially the family life, and in harmonious social relationships.' 'The meaning of life', he tells us again, 'lies in the sane and healthy enjoyment of it.' Of course it does. One has only to read, to assent. The only thing that bothers one is why this answer, so simple and so luminous, never occurred to one before? All the way down the ages philosophers have been ransacking the universe, turning Heaven and Hell inside out, scouring byways and rooting in ditches in their search for the meaning of life, and all the time it was staring them in the face. 'The meaning of life lies in the sane and healthy enjoyment of it.' What could be more obvious?

In order sanely and healthily to enjoy, we require good taste, intelligence, a disposition to be reasonable and a resolute adherence to the doctrine of the Golden Mean. Being intelligent, the Chinese realize that truth is not known, and that no creed is, accordingly, worth dying for. Consequently, they refuse to make themselves uncomfortable in order to avenge fancied slights upon the honour of non-existent entities, such as Nations, States, Races or Deities. The truth being unknown, to hold any belief with fervour is illogical; consequently, the Chinese have no temptation to follow the example of those who proceed as if the best way to demonstrate the truth of one's beliefs is to inflict pain upon those human beings who do not share them. And so, if called upon to fight, the Chinaman deserts.

'There can be nothing more silly', says Lin Yutang, 'if we keep our minds clear enough to see it, than a man popping his head "over the top" with gin-manufactured courage, in order to meet a lead bullet and die for a newspaper-manufactured "cause". If he can use his head in reading newspapers, he will not be at the front, and if he can abstain from gin and keep a cool head, he will logically and



## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

humanly be in a blue funk. . . . And it is not the novice but the man in service for four years who begins to realize that desertion is often a virtue one owes to oneself and the only sane course open to a sensible and honest man.'

Here at last, then, is the answer to our examination question, and how eminently reasonable it is. The West is suffering from overdevelopment of the will to believe and willingness to die and kill in defence of the resultant beliefs. How admirable, if it could be induced to substitute the wish to find out and an unwillingness to make the world uncomfortable, either for oneself or anybody else, in defence of propositions whose truth is not established. Men are, it would seem, only able to excite themselves in support of those beliefs which cannot be known to be true. Where the truth is known, it evokes no enthusiasm. Where it is, and in the nature of the case must remain, unknown, men hasten to supply the place of knowledge by converting their doctrines into dogmas, and then proceed to persecute whoever refuses to share the dogmas. Thus on behalf of the probably true belief that seven times seven makes forty-nine, nobody, so far as I am aware, has been anxious to make the world uncomfortable for anybody; but on behalf of the dogmas announced by States and Religions of which none can be known to be true, and the truth of any one of which must entail the falsity of the rest, they have fought with prodigious energy and died with invariable enthusiasm. If I were in charge of the educational system of this country, I should teach in the sphere of the intellect scepticism, and in that of conduct Laodiceanism. Such teaching would, no doubt, be denounced as pusillanimous and unworthy. Nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that its results would at the present time have an almost uniformly beneficial effect upon human happiness.

### *The Golden Mean of Confucius*

Abjuring heroics, we are enjoined to observe in practice the doctrine of the Golden Mean prescribed by both Confucius and Aristotle, but embraced with more whole-heartedness by the Chinese than by those frantic Greeks who marched and conquered with Alexander. Do not, says the doctrine of the Golden Mean, whatever else you do, be too spiritual. For what, pray, would happen to the human race, if everybody entered a monastery and went a-whoring after God? Do not, on the other hand, be too self-indulgent; for the



## *The Chinese Provide for It*

appetite for pleasure grows faster than the possibility of its satisfaction, and self-indulgence is always followed in one form or another by the feeling of 'the morning after'. Hence, if you would enjoy your life to the full, be prepared always to relinquish what you are doing, while you still wish to continue. Don't be too logical. You can't apply logic to life, for life is not tidy, as thought is tidy. In logic there are only blacks and whites; but life is an infinity of intermediate shades of grey. Don't allow yourself to be led into excesses of enthusiasm—a common failing this of Western man. The truth not being known, it is absurd to make sacrifices for it, and since we can never be sure of being right, it is always right to remember that we may be wrong. Don't try to get absolute justice in life. A system or a machine may be just, but it is also inhuman. For every human case is a special case, and no system therefore can completely apply to it. (It is interesting in this connection to learn that the Chinese have never evolved a rigid legal system, are grossly inefficient administrators, and have no notion of impersonal justice. They are reasonable in human relations, but they are never logical and they are rarely just.) Finally, don't take liberties with the supernatural. In fact, it is better to ignore the supernatural altogether. When Confucius was asked about the life after death, he answered, 'Don't know life—how know death?' There are no gods in the Confucian temples and no supernatural machinery is concealed by the Chinese clouds. Ethics not metaphysics preoccupied the mind of the good Confucius. Here we are, men and women, God knows how many millions of us, living our lives upon this earth. We have our work cut out to make a good job of them without bothering our heads about other lives in other places. The Chinese, says Mr. Lin Yutang, are 'in love with life, in love with this earth and will not forsake it for an invisible heaven.' 'Enjoy your life, unconscionable man, and go to sleep when your time comes.' The words are Lucretius's; but they admirably express the doctrine of the Confucian Chinese that the purpose of life is its reasonable enjoyment, and their very sensible refusal to look beyond the achievement of this purpose. The doctrine finds expression in some of the characteristic qualities of Chinese art of which I propose to write in a later Part.<sup>1</sup> It is, in general, an exquisite art rather than a profound one, and emphatically it is not symbolic. Objects, that is to say, are presented in and for themselves and not because of their

<sup>1</sup> See Part V.

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

symbolic value or their metaphysical significance. They are not windows through which the soul of man can glimpse the meaning of life; they are just objects.

And now let me affix a few labels to this Confucian pattern of life that I have so briefly sketched. It is agnostical, realist, humanist, Philistine, common-sensical, of the earth earthy. It is the natural creed of the good bourgeois all the world over, and in my view it is the only possible creed to live by, to live by, that is to say, for the six working days of the week. But it is not for the seventh, and for the seventh there is Taoism, Taoism with a tincture of Buddhism.

### *Taoism for Vagrants*

Confucianism, it is obvious, reproduces many of the characteristic features of Greek philosophy and develops them to their logical conclusion. If, therefore, the Chinese were exclusively Confucian, their attitude to life would be exposed in a more eminent degree to one of the criticisms which I have ventured to bring against that of the Greeks, the criticism, namely, that it fails to make provision for spiritual vagrancy. Taoism, however, makes this provision. Taoism is mystical, metaphysical, animistic and amoral. It holds respectability in little worth and willingly barter the solid satisfactions of a secure income and an estimable reputation for the freedom of the spirit to blow where it listeth. 'Man', as Mr. Lin Yutang puts it, 'has a hidden desire to go about with dishevelled hair which Confucianism does not quite permit. The man who enjoys slightly rebellious hair and bare feet goes to Taoism.' Let me, following Lin Yutang, try to summarize the main features of this intriguing creed. Taoism stands, first of all, for revolt 'against the artificiality and responsibilities of urban life and Confucian culture'; secondly, for the rural ideal of life and the cult of a primitive simplicity; thirdly, 'for the world of fancy and wonder, coupled with a childish naïve cosmogony'. Its political views are anarchic. What man needs is not to be governed and disciplined, but to be 'let alone'. Hence the governments which do nothing are the best governments. The restraints and conventions of urban life and the subjection to them which a successful career entails are deplored, and the man who disciplines himself to worldly success is regarded as having made a mistaken choice. Periods of mourning and uniforms of State, pageants, assemblies, receptions, committees, the parade and panoply of greatness, face-saving and

## *The Chinese Provide for It*

gentility and a goodly reputation, knowing the right people and keeping in with the Joneses—in a word all the observances and rituals of society to which the ordinary man so painstakingly conforms—these things Taoism ridicules and contemns. Not content with ridiculing and contemning, it offers an alternative pattern for man's conduct of life.

The game of being great is not worth the effort of playing it, but it is important, nevertheless, to avoid the enmity of the great. The ritual of society is not worth observing, but it is desirable not to incur society's censure. Therefore, Taoism advises, in your social relations avoid attention, lie low, lurk, and, when dragged from your lurking place, ape stupidity. 'Never be the first in the world', for those who are never first are never exposed to attack; 'let well alone'; 'let sleeping dogs lie'; 'great things can be reduced to small things and small things can be reduced to nothing'; 'make yourself small'; 'by losing that pawn one wins the whole game'—these are typical Taoist maxims. Also, cultivate hypocrisy, conceal your real intentions, camouflage your motives; so will you live at peace with your fellows and escape bothersome complications. What is important is not to do your duty by society, but to appear to do it, in order that you may dedicate the energy which your deceptive appearance of conformity has saved you and the leisure which it has won you to the more wholehearted and unremitting devotion of yourself to yourself. This, however, is not to make of self-cultivation a duty requiring energy and enjoining effort. Taoism, in fact, is the reverse of energetic. 'If a man desires too much or overworks and does not rest in time, the result will be the illness of Time. If he cannot control his passions he will get older and older, and the result will be the illness of Age. . . . The first step for a man who becomes a candidate for immortality is to keep life easy and the body young, since both mind and body have no inherent defect or trouble.' In other words, do as little as you can; don't press and don't fuss; save your energy; cultivate contentment. So, the Taoist affirmed, will you live a full and happy life.

### *Country Pleasures and the Retention of Wonder*

The rural ideal of life is enthusiastically celebrated in Chinese art and literature. 'In Chinese paintings on scrolls and porcelain', Mr. Lin Yutang tells us, 'there are two favourite themes, one being the happiness of family life with pictures of women and children in their

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

leisure, the other being the happiness of the rural life, with pictures of a fisherman, or a woodcutter, or a recluse sitting on the ground under a group of pine trees. These two themes may represent respectively the Confucianist and the Taoistic ideal of life'. Life with one's family in the country represents the mating of the two philosophies, and should, I suppose, make the best of both worlds. Yet the Taoist would, I suspect, object to the presence of the family, even of a respectful and harmonious family, a family of errand-runners, job-performers, 'yes-men' and face-savers, such as is celebrated by Mr. Clarence Day in his book, *Life with Father*, on the ground that it curtailed the vagrancy of the spirit. For the Taoist, it seems, naturally prefers rural discomfort to urban luxury, 'making things do' in the country cottage to 'having things just so' in the town house. He prefers a faulty home-made product to a perfect mass-produced one. Thus to quote Lin Yutang, 'A modern Confucianist would take city-licensed pasteurized Grade A milk, while a Taoist would take fresh milk from the milkman's pail in the country fashion . . .' on the ground, apparently, that the pasteurized Grade A milk 'smells not of the natural cream flavour but of the city councillors' ledgers and bank-books.'

Taoism stands, thirdly, for the wonder and mystery of the world—or rather, since the world may lack both, and it may be that it is only the human imagination that breeds the wonder and distils the mystery—for the recognition of man's need of them. For grown-ups the world is only too often trite and obvious. They have lost the sense of wonder which makes the world of the child at once a terror and a delight. Taoism keeps this sense alive, insisting upon the nearness of the unseen world to the surface of things. By providing fairies, ghosts and incantations for the peasant, mysticism and breathing exercises for the scholar, Taoism prevents man's spirit from subsiding altogether into the ruts of officialdom and conformity.

### *My Taoism Persistent and Irrepressible*

I have ventured to summarize this remarkable doctrine at some length primarily because it rings so many bells in my own consciousness. For my own life may be most conveniently described as a persistent and well-meaning attempt to maintain an official Confucianism perpetually frustrated by the irruptions of an unregenerate Taoism. I have, I consider, done my best to live a decent common-place sort

## *The Chinese Provide for It*

of life, to behave like other people, and to keep up appearances. The world, I am afraid, will refuse to believe this. Nevertheless, I insist that it is true. I insist, that is to say, that I really have tried. For sixteen years I was a Civil Servant, and during that miserable period I tried very hard indeed. And, on the whole, I have failed. The Civil Service ultimately disgorged me; I was too alien a body even for that voracious maw to assimilate. For always, in spite of my best efforts to conform, there has, it appears, been something about me which was not quite as it should be. About my dress, for example. My evening dress shirt inevitably becomes unstudded in front; when I ride, my gaiters face the wrong way round, and when I play tennis I support my trousers with the wrong kind of belt. I am claiming no merit for these idiosyncrasies; I regret my oddness and do my best to keep it under. Moreover, I doubt if I am so very odd after all. There lurks, I suspect, a Taoist in every man's heart, only most men have been more successful in concealing his presence than I have. Further, I am not as odd as I was, at least not so obviously odd. In these later years I have achieved a sort of working compromise between my Confucian and my Taoist self. But of this I shall speak later. My present concern is to describe the manner in which Taoism expresses itself in the life of a not untypical product of a highly standardized Confucian civilization; in fact, of myself.



## RURAL COUNTERFEITS OF SPIRITUAL VAGRANCY

---

### *Sartorial Taoism*

Let me begin with this matter of clothes. It is not, after all, true that in the matter of clothes I always do my best to conform. I do so only as a Confucian, and in my Taoist moments I revolt against my not very successful Confucianism. In my Taoist moments I prefer to look like a tramp. In this I often succeed. I go, let us say, to stay with friends, rich friends or grand friends, for a country week-end. I am the only guest who does not arrive in a car. Usually I have spent the best part of the day walking, not upon roads, but through woods and over fields. Perhaps I have sat under a hedge to eat my lunch or to look at the birds. I have no hat; my boots are muddy, and my clothes are only too often torn as the result of contact with barbed wire fences; for, now that I fatten, and grow old, I can no longer negotiate these as easily as I used to do. Such is my appearance that although I am an invited guest, although, indeed, I may be 'starring' as a guest, I have on more than one occasion been arrested by startled servants on the threshold of the houses of the great, where I am proposing to stay; it has seemed to them the most obvious of precautions to shut the door in my face while they go to make enquiries.

Like most men, I have a definite preference for old and used clothes. Unlike them, I give it scope whenever I can. I am, I suspect, one of the few men on any University staff who, coming direct from the country, enters his lecture-room with a rucksack on his back and lectures in rough tweed coat, flannel trousers and hobnailed boots. I belong to a broad-minded and Bohemian sort of club,<sup>1</sup> and so far as I am concerned, it is, I must admit, a very long-suffering one. But its members always look askance at my rucksack and will never, I suspect, accustom themselves to my lack of a hat.

This sartorial intransigence is no doubt in part due to the ill-success of my efforts at conformity. For I began my life with the

<sup>1</sup> I belong no longer.—C.E.M.J. 1943.

## *Rural Counterfeits of Spiritual Vagrancy*

sartorial intentions and ideals of a good middle-class Englishman. I did my best, I really did, to dress properly and to look like other people, but with the best will in the world I made a mess of it. And my failure was a failure from the first. I took longer to learn to dress myself than any other child, past or present, of my acquaintance. When my mother first put me into trousers, my absurdly non-prehensile fingers tried desperately to grapple with the buttons—tried, and failed, often with the most disastrous results. For years I was unable to button my shirt collars, and when I came to dress clothes, something always seemed to go wrong with the studs in the shirt front. These studs were my special bugbear. Either they entered the stud-holes with a reluctance so stubborn that the shirt was ruined from the outset by the marks of my sweating fingers vainly endeavouring to coerce them, or else they lay so loosely in the stud-holes' embraces that they would escape from them altogether at the first opportunity, and leave my shirt gaping to the world's curious gaze. I could never tie an evening dress tie, and at an early stage succumbed to the seduction of the made-up ones which I concealed at the back of my drawer. At school I made a fool of myself whenever I was required to wear any kind of regulation dress.

### *How I became a Pacifist*

Let me dwell for a moment upon my efforts to adapt myself to the uniform of the school O.T.C. My military career took place in the early days of the Officers' Training Corps—they were then known as Cadet Corps—and the khaki uniforms with which we were supplied were of a peculiarly coarse texture. From the stuff of the uniform harsh little hairs protruded and chafed the skin. At least, they chafed mine, particularly my legs, for puttees had not yet been provided for schoolboys, and we wore leather gaiters which, adhering tightly to the leg, pressed the trouser they encased hard upon the skin. So galling did I find this contact, that I was perpetually contriving devices for protecting my legs against the unrestricted incidence of the irksome khaki trousering. One day, in preparation for a long route-march, I tore a number of advertisement pages from a back number of the *Sketch* and wound them round my legs underneath the galling khaki. I hoped that the pressure of the gaiters would hold the pages in place. For a time it did, but only for a time. Presently the paper began to slip down and after a few miles lengthening rolls of it began

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

to protrude from the bottoms of my trouser-legs. There seemed no end to these lengths of paper. As ill-luck would have it, upon the pages thus exposed were advertisements of ladies' underwear and corsets. For hours I marched with this damaging display extending itself in an ever-lengthening trail from my feet. I cannot remember now what nameless vices, what unmentionable perversions, were laid to my charge, but I shall remember always the undying shame of those hours.

Incidents like this have, I suppose, given me what would now be described as a complex about dress. I am never quite comfortable when I am properly dressed, and perhaps for that reason I am never properly dressed. It is not that I consciously dress inappropriately. On the contrary, as I have said, I often try as hard as I can to look sartorially as other men look. So far as the general run of my dress is concerned, I may succeed. But always the effect is spoilt by some detail that has been overlooked. Something is missing which ought to be there, or something is there which ought not to be there. And, the grander my situation, the more uncomfortable I am apt to be. I am never, for example, entirely comfortable sitting on a properly turned out horse. It is, alas, so much smarter than I am, for I am only too likely to be without a hat, and, if I do happen to have gaiters, they will almost certainly be wrongly buttoned. I do my best to dress properly for tennis, but only too often find that my shoes are split and my socks grey. My evening dress shirts bunch, and, as I have already recorded, escape from their restraining studs. With growing years and self-assurance, I no longer try as hard as I did. I even take a pleasure in my untidiness. I use it as an acid test of the sincerity of my acquaintances' esteem. If people don't like me well enough to consort with me in spite of my appearance, that, I say to myself, only proves to me that they don't like me very much, and I am better without them. Or, again, if I don't dress well enough for So-and-so, he need not invite me. This defiant flaunting of my untidiness sounds like bravado, but it is, I suspect, more properly to be regarded as one of the safety-valves through which the steam of spiritual vagrancy blows itself off. Nor, I repeat, is it peculiar to me. Most men wear old clothes for choice, and it is not merely because they are more comfortable in them that they hasten at week-ends into flannel bags and sports coats.

## Rural Counterfeits of Spiritual Vagrancy

### Country Habits of my Contemporaries (Upper Class)

I turn to a more important expression of my instinctive Taoism, my resortings to the country. You are, I know, protesting that it is not necessary to be a spiritual scallywag to like the country. I agree that it is not. But there are ways of liking, ways and ways, and I have never come across any which exactly resembles mine.

That his spiritual vagrancy should take a man often into the country is, I think, from the nature of things, obvious. For the joys of a country as opposed to an urban life are, as we have seen, explicitly praised by Taoism. But what sort of country life?

Most of my acquaintances go to the country in order that they may there, under slightly changed conditions, continue to live the life they live in the town. They drive down in a car to country house or hotel, take tea, lounge in the garden or play tennis, have a drink, change for dinner, play bridge or read the illustrated papers, and go to bed. On Sunday morning they get up late, lounge again in the garden or again play tennis. Or they go off somewhere in a car. . . . Many of them, indeed, are imbued by the curious belief that almost any place is better than the one in which they happen to be. As a consequence, they spend most of their week-end at a place in going off to other places in a car. For example, if they are staying at Cambridge, they will take the car to Royston, if at Oxford to Abingdon. If the week-end is being spent at a country house and they want to do the right thing, they may even go to church. This habit, incidentally, is growing. At midday there is a large disabling meal, desultory talk and then sleep. Most of the guests have by this time exhausted the insides of one another's minds and have little to say at tea-time, but fresh visitors are by now available, having motored down for tea. These give a fillip to the talk, which goes on brightly during strolls in the garden or perhaps during another ride in the car. Then dinner, more bridge and talk, and the week-end is over.

Now *that* emphatically is not what I mean by being in the country; nor do such pursuits connote even the beginnings of a love of it. Indeed they are not the pursuits of spiritual vagrants at all. Which are? To answer, I must try to give some account of my own rural proceedings. For this I make no apology. The love of and the resort to the country are the most important and persistent things in my life; the country is also the chief safety valve of my spiritual Taoism. The subject is, then, supremely relevant and I propose to do myself and it justice.

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

### *Country Habits of my Contemporaries (Cultivated Classes)*

To begin with, I always endeavour to approach whatever place I may be visiting, whether farm house or 'digs' or country pub or the house of friends, on foot. I don't like being in the country, especially if it is new country, and in particular I don't like sleeping in it, unless I have first made my accommodation with it by introducing myself to it, as it were, and securing its tolerance of my presence. Now this I can most readily do by walking through it before arrival, preferably sweating and enduring a little on my walk, eating an apple or so or a few nuts from its trees, picking one or two flowers, lying a little on the grass or under a hedge, possibly finding a bird's nest or two, and having a drink in the local pub. To arrive in a car is to take the country by storm, raping it, as it were, before it has signified, or has had a chance of signifying its readiness to receive one. And, inevitably, from such a method of approach it withholds much of what it has to give. Health is perhaps vouchsafed to the body, but there is no refreshment or uplifting of the spirit.

My approach to the country, ill-dressed and on foot, sets the key of an attitude different from any that I have observed in my contemporaries. Of the treatment of the country by my unintelligent contemporaries I have already spoken. It is, broadly speaking, a treatment of studied neglect. The more intelligent of my contemporaries do not neglect the country; on the contrary they value it, but they value it as a background, a pleasant background, to the avocations of man. Their attitude, in fact, is that of the eighteenth century. They can, they find, do certain things in the country better than they can do them elsewhere; but they are not essentially different things from what they do elsewhere. For example, they go to the country to write, or to read, or to meditate, or to discuss important questions of private emotion or public weal with greater privacy and concentration than they could achieve in town. One such, having built himself a beautiful house climbing like an Italian villa up the slope of a hill, deliberately christened a certain path in his grounds 'The Statesman's Walk'. The path yields a magnificent view, one of the best anywhere known to me, over the Sussex weald to the South Downs, and he pictured himself and other eminent gentlemen pacing with measured footfall up and down the path, hands behind back and brows bent, discussing high affairs of State. The thought in his mind was, I imagine, that the amplitude of the view would give breadth



## *Rural Counterfeits of Spiritual Vagrancy*

and depth to the discussion and serenity to the discussers; but I don't suppose that he otherwise took it into account. It did not, I fancy, occur to him that it might put him and his fellow statesmen into perspective.

Other cultivated and intelligent persons of my acquaintance have made a cult of walking in the country. These were the forerunners of the modern 'hiker'. Brought up in the Stevenson-Hazlitt tradition, a tradition later enriched and embroidered by Chesterton and Belloc, they would set out on walking tours, drinking beer enthusiastically in pubs, religiously engaging the natives in conversation, and ritualistically eating ham and eggs for breakfast. This walking cult is, or was, strong enough to have enabled its devotees to set fashions in counties. Just before the War the Cotswolds were 'all the go'; one went there on reading parties from Oxford, and after one had 'gone down' one went and walked there with one's wife. After the War Sussex was discovered. To-day, Dorset is *de rigueur*; Dorset, it is said, is still unexploited, and its natives have been invested by the Powys brothers with a certain corrupt glamour, like the phosphorescent glow which may be seen to surround a decayed lobster in the dark. But even as I write, the sun of Essex is rising over the eastern horizon of the rurally aspiring intellectual, unaccountably, since, lovely and mysterious as Essex is, it is emphatically not a county for walking.

The devotees of the cult of country walking have come of late years to include young women, hearty young women complete with rucksacks, hobnailed boots and hot shiny faces, looking determinedly at maps and desperately anxious to do the right thing. These country walkers cover vast tracts of England, and after they have been on the roads for a little time, and sometimes before that, they can talk with detailed information about routes and villages and the peculiar features of this county and of that. But, for all that, they know very little about the country itself. From the very nature of the case they are passengers through it and not dwellers in it. They do not share in its pleasures; they do not follow its pursuits; and they do not establish with it that feeling of homely familiarity which is born of the intensive knowledge of one spot.

### *Author's Progress in Rural Education*

Like other good, young, literary men of my age I too started in this way. I roamed at large over the countryside, sleeping haphazard

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

in pubs, digs, guest-houses and farm-houses—there were no youth hostels then—and even, when I was very young indeed and the weather was fine, under haystacks. That, certainly, was the way to gain an acquaintance with England, superficial though I now see it to have been, and as I passed from one coloured county to another, I accumulated a store of memories of quiet and lovely places. As I grew older, however, I began to specialize. Certain counties sorted themselves out from the ruck, and I began to indulge myself in the pleasures of favouritism. Certain places came increasingly to be visited; others to be neglected. Finally there came a time when I wanted a place of my own, however modest, to which I would be content to go always, turning my back on the beauty of England as a whole in order that I might the better concentrate on the one loved spot. This tendency to specialization has in these latter years been accentuated by the growing difficulty of finding unspoilt country; so often has it happened that, going in search of beauty and quiet and the refreshment of the spirit which country sights and sounds alone can bring, I have come only upon some new spreading of the pink rash, the sounds of wireless and the hooting of cars.

Now the promiscuous country walkers seem to me to be more meritorious than the eighteenth-century country gentlemen, just as the eighteenth-century gentlemen are more meritorious than the road-house, or the country house week-enders. For the walkers are at least after their fashion making their escape from civilization, even if the form of escape is itself fashionable. But they are not for the most part making sacrifice on the altar of Taoism; they are not spiritual vagrants. Who, then, is the spiritual vagrant and by what signs shall we know him?

## SOME ELEMENTS OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY VAGRANCY

---

I can only answer, for the issues the question raises are highly personal—indeed, my whole conception of spiritual vagrancy may be a will-o'-the-wisp born of much reading about Chinese culture—by reverting to myself and to my own tastes. I have spoken already of my approach to the country. I turn now to the mode of my being in it.

### *Modes of Staying in the Country*

When I am in the country, I like best to stay in a farm-house. I like the stirring of the farmyard; I like taking an occasional and inexpert hand in the work of the farm, and I like to hear the farm gossip. The life of the farm is as different as it can well be from the life of the town. For the farm is a little world of its own, and in it the doings of the world proper fall into their right perspective. One opens the paper in the morning to see what particular sort of a beast the world proper has been making of itself in one's absence, and, as one reads of wars and preparations for wars, of robbery and snobbery, of vanity and silliness and cruelty, one suddenly realizes that these things have ceased very much to matter. Quickly one falls into the mood in which one says to oneself, 'Even if the whole of London and everyone and everything in it were to disappear from the face of the earth, I shouldn't much mind; I should even be glad'.

In favour of farm-houses is the fact that it is still possible in them to get local food, peas and beans from the garden, honey from the hives and cream.<sup>1</sup>

After farms I like to stay in inns or cottages. It is pleasant, when you have been out all day, to sit in the bar and listen to the talk. But I have no wish now to join in it or to emulate the heartiness of those townsmen who bandy words and crack jokes with the landlord.

I like inns and cottages partly because they are dark. Light houses

<sup>1</sup> But here see Chapter 8, p. 119.

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

are now the fashion. The more windows, in fact, the better. Some of the dwellers in modern country houses built in the Jacobethan style are so glass-encased that they live with as little privacy as a goldfish. The sun, it is averred, is beneficial to the health, and light makes for cheerfulness: also, the residents are much addicted to views, and accordingly cut down the old trees which might have given their staring houses the dignity of a little concealment, the better to enjoy them.

### *Indoor Darkness and Outdoor Views*

These notions seem to me to be 'towny' and of the town. At any rate they are not mine. The peasant who has been working all day in the fields has had light enough and to spare. The house is for him a shelter not a window, and, once he is in it, he wants to forget what is outside. I agree with the peasant. When I am in, I like to be in, and I like the little windows set in deep embrasures that let in so little light, and look out only upon cabbages and a hedge. A view is all very well in its way, but it is the least of all the good things that the country offers. It is no accident, then, that it is the one which the townsman most values. It is the motorist not the countryman who goes out of his way to look at a view for its own sake, and among the hordes of cars that gather at Newlands Corner or at Whiteways or on Hindhead, you will find no rustics, save such as may have been brought there parasitically in hope of gain. The first vision of a wide prospect, especially if it bursts suddenly upon you, is exhilarating, but you can no more go on looking at it than you can go on smelling a flower. For my part, I consider that a copse with a little stream running through it, or a meadow set with trees, or even a kitchen garden, are better worth looking at and living with than the grandest view in the world, and so I have no temptation to give up darkness, privacy and the sense of being indoors which one enjoys in cottages in exchange for a wide prospect; nor for it would I sacrifice a single tree.

### *Hotels and Country Houses*

I avoid hotels. The ordinary, country hotel complete with A.A. and R.A.C. signs is a horror. It is not of the country at all but of the town, being, in fact, a little bit of town dumped down in the country. Its clients are townsmen—motorists usually, sitting, all liver and no legs, on cane chairs in the lounge and demanding drinks—its food is

## *Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy*

mass-produced and tin-disgorged—whoever heard of home-made jam, vegetables from the garden, or fruit or meat that was not imported from the colonies being served in one of these places?—and its charges are often outrageous—five or six shillings being the normal price for a tasteless, pretentious dinner. For my part, I would sooner eat bread and cheese and an onion in the bar parlours that still occasionally survive privily in the back parts of these places, than partake of the six-course dinner in the dining-room. The food at the back is at least honest, and the company, if it talks less, talks less foolishly.

I have much the same feelings about big country houses. I not infrequently stay at these, and sometimes I enjoy myself very much. I am a good talker and am found useful in the matter of keeping the conversation going at dinner; besides my name is just well enough known for some people, remote from the stir of things, to wish to treat me as a lion, albeit a little one. But I never feel comfortable in these great places, and never lose the sensation that I am somehow playing a part. Sooner or later I make some excuse for leaving the company of 'the quality' and start roaming round the back premises. I like talking to grooms and gardeners, and I derive inexpressible pleasure from being invited to tea in the housekeeper's room. Moreover, although with 'the quality' I am talkative and confident, or at least contrive to appear so, in the housekeeper's room I am humble and respectful, as ready to receive the law from its owner as I am apt to lay it down to her master and mistress.

### *Parkland, Country Wild and Country Tame*

I do not admire parks. No doubt the great stretches of green are very fine—certainly I have never seen their like in any other country—and old park trees are among the noblest things in nature. But there is a sameness about parks and an absence of detail. For what, after all, do they contain but trees and grass and those overrated animals, deer? And, unlike fields, which are individual and different, one stretch of parkland is hardly to be distinguished from another. I like country to be either wild or cultivated, and a park is neither.

On entering certain kinds of wild country, I have an instinctive feeling of homecoming. Let there be a valley in the foothills of an upland country; let it be strewn with great boulders, and through it let there be running a small stream; beside it grow bushes and little



## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

twisted trees; the ground is not very fertile, but, as the valley broadens, there are hedges and copses, and presently cultivated fields. And all along its length there is a profusion of wild life. Such a place I feel to be native to me, and when I come upon it I have a sense of return. From it I feel I have at some time in the remote past been inexplicably parted; to it I hope one day in the not too remote future to come back, and for ever.

For cultivated land my feeling is different. Why, by the way, will people talk and poets write, as if the feelings nature arouses in us were few, simple and, broadly speaking, the same? They are at least as various as those evoked by human beings. The emotions which I feel at the sight of ploughed fields and village lanes are as different from those which moorland evokes, as my feelings for a pretty girl are different from my interest in an amusing but elderly gourmet.

Now, if I were going to live permanently in the country, I should choose country that was cultivated. For one must make a distinction between the country that thrills and excites and the country which is for everyday use, just as one must make a distinction between the music that inflames and exalts and the music which is the necessary accompaniment of one's daily life. I can and do listen to Bach every day; he is what I call bread-and-butter music. But it is only on special occasions that I wish to hear the late Beethoven Sonatas. Similarly with the country. There is country for grand occasions and country for every day, and it is in cultivated country which is for every day that, if I had to make a choice, I should live. For one thing, cultivated and not wild country offers the best and most varied walking. Through a farmyard, over a couple of fields, into a copse, down a lane, through a village and into a park—that is the kind of walk I like best. This mixed and varied country is the peculiar glory of southern England. Every hundred yards the country has a new feel and flavour of its own, and like the courses of a perfectly chosen meal, each feel and each flavour enhances and is enhanced by what went before and what comes after. Now it is precisely the absence of any such individual feel and flavour that is the deficiency of parks—parks having, if I may permitted to mix my metaphor, no bouquet and no after-taste.

### *Country Worked in and Country Played in*

Why not? The question is not easy to answer without lapsing into

## Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy

animism. I have discovered, or rather—for I must not claim credit for a discovery that was in fact communicated to me by one more knowledgeable—it has been pointed out to me, and I immediately realized that the pointing out was but the bringing into my consciousness of something I had known all along, but had not the wit to realize that I knew, that no country except wild country can exert its full power to charm, to strengthen and to refresh, unless it has first been mixed with the spirit of man. It must have been either worked in or played in continuously for many years, and of the two it is better that it should have been worked in. And equally, you cannot get out of the country all that it has the power to give, unless you too have mixed your spirit with it, working in it or playing in it; and again working is the better. The best thing of all, I imagine, is to sow, to plough and to reap; the next best to plant and to tend trees, or to hedge and ditch; and the next best to attend to beasts. Walking, at any rate, is not enough. To garden is good, and it is the only one of these goods which is normally vouchsafed to the city dweller; but even among gardens a work garden which is a vegetable garden, is better than a play garden which is a flower one. And if he can do none of these things, yet would still savour the spirit of the country, then a man must play in it. But he must play at country things, at shooting, fishing, hunting, or birds-nesting, not at tennis or golf, which are not pursuits of the country, but town games forcibly imposed upon the country like the houses of those that play them.

Tennis in particular closes the eyes and ears to country sights and sounds, and seals every spiritual sense. The raw, red gash of an *en-tout-cas* court in the surrounding green is a symbol of the breach that tennis makes in the country mood. You can get more good from the country by birds-nesting for an afternoon over a couple of hundred yards of lane, than by walking twenty miles along roads and foot-paths. The discovery of this fact was one of the reasons which led me to give up walking indiscriminately through the country and made me concentrate increasingly upon one or more known and loved areas. In general, any effort is good provided that in its exercise we are brought into physical contact with country things, earth, or vegetables, or plants, or trees. It was this same discovery which showed me what was wrong with parks and right with fields. Parks have not been worked in; fields have. For the same reason, there is a greater attraction and a richer atmosphere about a country cottage gar-

## Spiritual Vagrancy

den, with its rows of beans and cabbages, hollyhocks and canterbury bells, than can be found in the formal rose garden of the great house.

### *Official Recognition of Mysticism*

That these things are so cannot, I think, be reasonably doubted; but why they are so is another matter. Officially, as I shall tell in Part II, I am a rationalist or, at least, a near rationalist.<sup>1</sup> That there is more in heaven and earth than rationalism recognizes, I am ready to admit. But this 'more', in so far as I am prepared to concede it, is, I conceive, of an austere and elevated nature; it consists for example, of goodness, truth and beauty, and of the immutable entities, whatever they may be, with which higher mathematics is concerned. The future expansion of the human intelligence to which my official philosophy commits me—my speculations about telepathy on a later page may serve as an illustration of this official view—will, I believe, reveal to our remote posterity larger areas of the universe than are at present known. And this extended cosmic area to be revealed to the human consciousness of the future will, I am led to suppose, be of the same general type as that into which the artists and mystics have already penetrated. For mystics, I hold, are biological sports on the spiritual plane, who, in virtue of their precocity are in receipt of advance intimations of those experiences which the deepened and quickened apprehension of posterity may make available to all human minds.

I say again, then, that there is probably more in the universe than rationalism admits. It may be that in listening to Bach fugues, to posthumous Beethoven quartets, or to the last twenty minutes of the Second Act of *Figaro*, or in reading Shakespeare's songs and sonnets, persons of even ordinary sensibility already make contact with this 'more'. But æsthetic experiences of this type, if, indeed, they have the significance which I am claiming for them, are, I repeat, austere, exalting and elevated. They are a foretaste of what the human race may one day become, rather than a harking back to what it once was, and in any event the philosophy in which I suggest this view of them is, as I have said, official, expounded by me in works which, I hope, are no less austere and elevated than the kind of universe to which they point.<sup>2</sup> At present spiritual vagrancy rather than official philo-

<sup>1</sup> This is no longer true.—C.E.M.J., 1943.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., *My Matter, Life and Value*, or the last half of *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*.

## *Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy*

sophy is my theme. I am trying to follow the unco-ordinated intimations of the spirit, not to sketch the systematized view which reason may take of the destiny of man and the nature of the universe. And as a spiritual vagrant I have—I hope that the admission will not set the reader against me—feelings which are not austere, instincts which are not elevated. I can best describe them as unashamedly animistic.

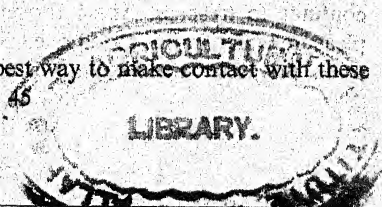
### *Excursion into Animism*

The nature gods, I feel, rather than think, are not dead. They abide still in certain kinds of country, and I know, or think I do, what kinds of country are inhabited by what kinds of gods. If I were dropped from an aeroplane in a parachute on a dark night, I should, I hope, know whether it was in down country, in river country, among mountains, or in one of those many tracts of dead country, whose spirit has evaporated under the embraces of too many lovers, for example, in one of the properties of the National Trust, that I had alighted. There are places on the Wiltshire downs, for instance, which are recognizably the homes of creatures of the faun, satyr or puck type, which, given their chance, would delight to bemuse and mislead, but would not actually to harm the traveller. The Leys that lead up from Bablock-hithe to Cumnor are haunted by a quieter creature, stupid, bucolic and kindly. There are places in the Lakes, particularly in the southern parts, where the big mountains become foothills that fall away to the sea, where the indwelling presences are loftier, more mysterious, more aloof.

Now parks, from this point of view, are lifeless, or nearly so. Not so, however, the cultivated country which surrounds villages, where men have worked for hundreds of years, and by much contact with the land have impregnated with their sweat and endeavour unseen companions, who in their turn have contributed something of their own nature—their calm, their quietness and their patience—to the unwitting labourers. Hence the atmosphere of serenity and peace which still bathes the English country village, and the spiritual refreshment which the walker, coming direct from the town, may derive from the unemphatic beauty of cultivated land.

### *Pursuits of the Vagrant*

For my part, I find that the best way to make contact with these





## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

creatures, or rather with their essence, for alas, I have never seen them, is to lapse into the completest emptiness of the spirit that I can compass. When I am alone and at large in the country, I try to make my mind a complete blank. I do not, that is to say, meditate great works, ponder the state of the world, or anxiously consider my own affairs. I think of nothing at all. I look at flowers, listen to birds, climb into the branches of trees, and mentally and spiritually 'play truant'. The concrete manifestations of mental and spiritual truancy are keeping off roads, avoiding people, and loping discursively across the country, through fields, into copses and over gates; they are also lying under hedges, messing about with streams, and, the confession must be made, throwing an occasional stone at a rabbit or a sheep.

That spiritual vagrancy should entail trespassing, and trespassing for its own sake, is, I think, obvious. For the spiritual vagrant, when his mood is upon him, feels not merely indifferent but hostile to society. His is the mood of the boy who steals apples from the farmer's orchard matured and crystallized into a conscious attitude. He wants, though he could not explain why he wants, to do a little preying upon society. And so, whenever I can, I trespass.

God knows, there is not much difficulty in finding occasions for the exercise of my taste. Increasingly, since the coming of the 'hiker', the countryside of England is fenced and barred. In the north the moors are sacred to the preservation of grouse; upon all the woods of the south the hand of the keeper lies heavy. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the one supreme purpose, the maximization of the number of fat birds to serve as targets for the ill-directed guns of stockbrokers. It would, then, be increasingly difficult to avoid trespassing, even if this were desired. But with me it is not desired. I enjoy the slight feeling of insecurity which the realization of being on forbidden ground brings. I used to like the actual encounters with keepers whom I could once outrun. Now I have to out-talk them, and the effort requires that I should summon to my aid the resources of an alert and sophisticated mind, which my ranging about the country has put to sleep. In the mood of spiritual vagrancy the intellect is in abeyance, and a trumpet call to the regiments of the mind shatters the mood. Nowadays, then, I avoid gamekeepers; but I continue to trespass. Apart altogether from the slightly malicious pleasure which in this mood one takes in being where one ought not to be, privately owned country is apt to be richer in those feels and



## *Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy*

flavours which I have just tried so badly and so anthropomorphically to describe. Inevitably, since it is less visited. Nature spirits, the friendly ones that dwell in England, like human beings provided that there are not too many of them, and provided that they are not all strangers. Like the little birds that fly along beside you when you walk down a lane, or the squirrel that peeps at you from behind a branch, nature spirits are curious about mankind, and thrive upon the connection. But if the humans are too many, come too often, or are too strange, the country is unable to assimilate them. The genius loci departs, the atmosphere evaporates, and the place loses its sovereign virtue. Hence the spiritual deadness of the properties of the National Trust, of woods owned by municipal bodies, of show parks and gardens and other places much visited by the public!

### *Myself and Hikers*

With the invasion of the country by the town, entailing mass hiking, disgorged motorists, and parties in charabancs, the number of these spiritually empty country places is growing. The sense of spiritual deadness on over-frequented mountain tops like Great Gable and Helvellyn, places that once owned a palpable atmosphere of their own, is particularly noticeable. They have, as it were, lost their tang.

Though I denounce cars, I am all for hiking and youth hostels. Our towns are an abomination, and the more people leave them, the better. It is to my mind wholly a good thing that hiking should have replaced beer as the shortest cut out of Manchester. Nevertheless, though I officially admire and support this movement, my official attitude is once again at variance with my instinctive practice, for in practice I eschew the hikers and avoid the places where they go. This is not as yet difficult. These armies of young men and women who make their weekly sorties into the country are timid. Like guests, they are on their good behaviour, being desperately anxious to behave properly, not to offend farmers, not to frighten pheasants, not to leave open gates or to tread on growing crops. In my more exalted moods of spiritual vagrancy I have, from a lurking place behind a hedge, cocked snooks at a long line of them marching along some permitted, asphalted path. Officially, I am a Socialist, and preach that the land should be owned by the people. But in the vagrant mood, when I enjoy the feeling of mixed lurking and larking that trespassing always engenders, I am delighted to think that there

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

should still be private places where the many cannot follow or find me. I should hate to think that I could legally go anywhere, and I am half afraid that under Socialism I could.

### *Passage from Vagrant to Guest*

Trespassing on to the estate of some large country house in which I am invited to stay provides perhaps the most striking transition between the moods of the two philosophies, Taoism and Confucianism, which I began by trying to depict. I approach the house to which I am bidden as a guest after a day's walking in the country, perspiring, footsore, dirty, and tramp-like. And I approach it usually through its back parts, passing through a paddock, across an orchard, along a garden path, and so into the courtyard. And sometimes during my progress, when I am in the orchard, let us say, I am challenged by a gardener or a keeper and stopped. What on earth, I am asked, do I think I am doing in a private garden? According to my mood, I have cheeked, blustered, apologized, explained, or simply run away—run away, that is to say, out of the orchard, round to the front, across the lawn, on to the drive to ring the front-door bell. And as I have stood on the step waiting for the door to open, I have become transmogrified, not sartorially—that is to come later—but spiritually. No longer an anonymous vagrant with an outraged gardener at my heels, a challenge to the cursing and chivvyng of every underling, I am now a respectable personage. I am even a known 'thinker' preparing to add lustre to a week-end party, which I have been summoned to leaven with my putative brains. By the time I take my place at the tea-table, I am self-confident, knowledgeable, up to date, urbane, and the mood of twenty minutes since seems in retrospect to have belonged to a different person. Two hours later I appear, having bathed, in evening dress, and the metamorphosis is complete.

### *Catalogue of Likes and Dislikes. Snow, Darkness and the Moon*

I have become suddenly conscious of the length to which this disquisition upon the rural manifestations of spiritual vagrancy has led me. No doubt I can excuse myself by reminding the reader that the living of a country life and the following of country pursuits are two of the cardinal elements in Taoist doctrine, and I am anxious to show what a persistent determination to carry Taoism in its rural aspect into practice actually entails for a member of a machine-made

## *Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy*

civilization who is required to live in London. Still, when all allowance is made for the importance of the subject, I have, it must be admitted, been long enough in all conscience at the job—partly because it is the first time I have attempted it, and until one has said a thing often, one cannot learn to say it shortly, partly, perhaps, because until one starts to disembarass one's mind upon a particular subject, one does not realize how much there is to come out—and I am anxious to draw to a conclusion. I propose, then, to complete the catalogue of my rural likes and dislikes as quickly as I may, and have done.

I dislike snow. The taste for it in nature seems to me to be a child's taste. 'How pretty everything looks,' we say, after a fall of snow; and so it does to a first glance. But only to a first. The eye accustomed to the infinite variety of nature quickly tires of the unvarying white. Every variation of contour, every subtle nuance of shadow and colour is ironed out, for all the world as if the country had been put under a blanket.

For much the same reason I dislike the dark. Many people profess a great love of country walking by night: but I notice that they are always townsmen. The country dweller is commonly too conscious of the hostile influence that emanates from the land, when the sun goes down. The familiar day-time presences depart, to be succeeded by others that know nothing of men. Even the most accustomed garden becomes alien and aloof when darkness falls. My great fear in the country—it has overcast many a waning winter afternoon—is to be caught from home in the dark. Long before there is any real danger of being benighted, I have quickened my walk to a run. Distracted and dripping with sweat, I rush up hill and down, blundering against gorse bushes, crashing through hedges, stumbling over roots, in my frantic eagerness to find one of those roads which in daytime I so sedulously avoid. Not to be able to see properly is a terrifying thing. When dusk falls, all my country confidence and assurance, my instinctive knowledge of where I am, my vaunted ability to find the way from anywhere to anywhere disappears as, hitting myself against obstacles and entangling myself with brambles, I struggle frantically to get home before the light goes. There are many who like to sleep under canvas; some even sleep under the sky. I admire their hardihood, but do not wish to emulate it. Moreover, I have noticed that it is the hardihood of the townsman. No countryman that I have known has ever dreamed of doing such a silly thing.

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

Since the invasion of the country by the towns, night walking has become a popular pursuit. Headed by an intrepid leader, parties of a dozen or more go tramping through the country hoping to see the sunrise. They may sometimes see the sunrise, but they see nothing else. For what can be duller than the country at night, if you are used to using your eyes in the daytime? If there is a moon, the night is no more tolerable. The moon goddess I find not merely indifferent, but inimical. The hard white glare that lies upon everything drains the countryside of friendliness no less than of colour. Lovers, it is said, like to walk in the moonlight, which they think is friendly to them; but in this belief they are mistaken. The moon is undoubtedly laughing at them, but the laughter is not kindly.

### *Country Weather*

I like almost all weathers in the country, and more than any of them do I like their contrast. When I go to Switzerland or to the South of France and step out on to the station platform after a night in the train, the sky is a positive delight. It is so clear, so bright, so incredibly blue, with a clearness, a brightness and a blueness such as in England we never or very rarely know. Indeed, it is often not blue at all, but purple. And then, as day succeeds day, with never a change in the sky which has always the same clearness, the same brightness, the same purplish blue, I find this unchanging ceiling monotonous. I long for variety, for the rapid changes of colour and shape to which I am accustomed, for clouds to obscure the brightness, for a haze to tone the blue, for the blurred, misty outlines that only the English sky can show. It is in England that the cloud artist produces his best effects, painting for our delight an everchanging picture of shifting shapes, dun and brown and white and purple and grey, moving and dissolving across the background of intermittent blue.

On reflection, I admit to two, and only two, dislikeable kinds of English weather. The first is the east wind weather of early March. There are days—every year brings nearly a dozen of them—when the wind cuts like a knife, the sun glares palely down from a blue sky, and the pavements look as if they had been scoured into the whiteness of corruption. It is not the cold that I mind; I like cold. But I am no supporter of wind, and the east wind particularly at these times takes all the colour from things. The country is empty and lifeless; nothing is yet stirring, and the bright, brittle sunshine shows up its



### *Some Elements of Twentieth-Century Vagrancy*

shabbiness. This, indeed, is the only time when the country is shabby. The dry leaves and the sparse, old grass look their worst under the bright sky. There are no smells, no sounds and no birds sing.

The other kind of weather, which I dislike even more, is apt to occur on days in late July, or in August. These are heavy, sultry days with thick, drifting clouds muffling the sky, as it were in wool, and a high, hot, stale wind. This wind blows unceasingly, sapping your energy, blighting your hopes, and producing a conviction that nothing is worth an effort. Fly in the face of this conviction, and you find yourself in a bath of enfeebling sweat. I suppose that there are many places in the world, tropical places, where the weather is more or less permanently like this, or is worse than this, and many people who adopt more or less permanently this attitude to life. I have only one comment: the expression of a heartfelt thankfulness that I live in England and a heartfelt complacency that I am not like 'many people'. For normally I enjoy my life and think most of the things I do worth while: in fact, I never play a game without feeling for the time being that to win it is the most important thing in the world. My normal pleasure in existence is the measure of my dislike for these un zestful days. No wonder that August, in any event a hateful month, given over to children and beach entertainments, produces the largest crop of suicides of any month in the year.

There are times when I find long summer evenings unutterably melancholy. They are bad enough in town; in the country they are often unbearable. In this respect daylight saving has definitely embittered my summers. That one should never be free from the challenge of out-of-doors; that, as a consequence, one should never feel justified in being in; that it should never be time to pull the curtains; that it should never be dark—these are things very wearing to the spirit. A fine summer evening is no doubt very well in its way; but like all beautiful things it constitutes a challenge, a challenge to 'do something about it'. And because there is nothing appropriate that one can do, because one cannot meet the challenge, one is restless and disquieted. How keenly at such times one longs for a short winter afternoon, the pulling of the curtains and the making of toast by a blazing fire. Winter, in any event, is the best time for the country. But the summer need not have been made worse than it naturally is by Mr. Willett's gratuitous prolongation.



## THE VAGRANT AND SOCIETY

*Dislike of Apparatus of Civilization*

To have set down with such elaboration the foregoing list of habits and tastes testifies, it may be said, only to the self-importance of the author which leads him to suppose that whatever happens to him must be of interest to others. For the pursuits and idiosyncrasies described are merely the personal expression of a commonplace desire for an occasional escape from a highly artificial civilization. We all at times, the ill-disposed might add, share this desire, but we don't make such a song about it, or imagine that others will wish to hear of its realization.

Possibly; possibly not. No doubt many of us feel at times the wish to escape—H. G. Wells has unforgettably described the fugitive impulse which is to-day experienced to an unusual degree by artists, writers, thinkers and reformers at the beginning of his *Experiment in Autobiography*—and I do not wish to flatter myself that what I have called my spiritual vagrancy has any unique psychological significance. But although the desire may be common enough, its expression is in my case, I believe, individual. I cannot, that is to say, find that 'escapism' takes in any of my friends and acquaintances precisely the same slightly disreputable form that it does in me. They explore deserts, go to Everest or the North Pole, lead lost causes, or think the world well lost for love. But they do not make their way in shabby clothes to the back parts of imposing country mansions or feed off raw onions in public bars. Nor, I imagine, though they may wish temporarily to escape from the appliances and apparatus of civilization, do they regard them more or less continuously, as I do, with fear and dislike. For my part, I dispense with the material benefits of civilization whenever I can, and regard every fresh success in dispensation as a personal triumph. One of the reasons why I like staying in country cottages is that many of them are still mercifully without electric light. Above all lights, I like the light of oil lamps, but I would sooner read in bed by candlelight, inadequate as it often is,

## *The Vagrant and Society*

than by the glow of the most perfectly shaded electric lamp. Food that is cooked on an open fire always to my mind tastes better than that which is heated in a gas oven or by electricity. A bird or a steak can, indeed, only be cooked to perfection on a coal fire; but even if this were not so, I should still prefer the coal fire.

Mr. Lin Yutang, whom I quoted at the beginning, makes fun of the West for identifying civilization with vacuum-cleaners and flush water-closets. 'The glorification of the plumber in America,' he points out, 'has made the man forget that one can live a very happy life without hot and cold running water, and that in France and Germany many men have lived to comfortable old age and made important scientific discoveries and written masterpieces with their water jug and old-fashioned basin.' How cordially I agree. I dislike flush water-closets, and in spite of the inconvenience prefer the earth affair at the end of the garden. I suppose that I have usually been happy at the times when I have had to use these affairs, and some part of the happiness has overflowed and attached itself to this humble incidental accompaniment.

### *The Author Reduces His Wants*

My friends who reside in the country make much of the importance of baths. They clamour for hot water on tap and are for ever applying it to themselves. A tedious occupation! The degree of cleanliness insisted upon by the middle classes of this country is by the standard of all wise organisms, for example, cats or Chinese, excessive. For my part, when I am in the country, I go happily for weeks without bathing at all.

Again I have grown a beard, not because I wish to appear æsthetic or odd, but simply to absolve myself from the need for perpetual resort to the appliances for shaving. My beard, in fact, is a small tribute to the truth of those philosophies, of which Taoism is so eminent an example, which find the secret of happiness in the diminution of wants. It is, I suspect, for the same reason that I eschew fountain pens, write upon inadequate slips of paper with the scrubby stumps of pencils, refrain from automatic cigarette lighters, and distrust every machine at sight.

Metal, I am sometimes tempted to think, is the source of all evil. If metal had not been discovered, there would be no guns, no iron-clads, no aeroplanes, no bombs, no factories, and no cars. Accord-

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

ingly, I do what I can to eliminate the use of metal from my own life, and contrive to manage, whenever possible, with wood. There is only one metal object, I am proud to say, in all my library. Finally, I react against advertisements. It is enough for me to see a commodity advertised to refrain from buying it. I justify myself with the reflection that the money which ought to have gone into making it good, has in fact gone into telling me that it is good when it isn't. This, I know, is bad economics, and bears all the marks of a rationalization.

### *And Preys upon Society*

Rationalization of what? Of—I return to the point—the spiritual vagrant's dislike of civilization and its appliances. When I am in my vagrant mood, society, as I have said, appears to me as something to be preyed upon—I think of it as a great cow, whose udders are for the privy squeezing of the supple fingers of the vagrant. It is even thus, I conceive, that gipsies regard civilization. For example, as a vagrant I cheat the railway company whenever I can, returning on the next day with a cheap day return ticket or alleging, when I arrive ticketless at my destination, that I entered the train at a station nearer to it than was in fact the case. It is in this mood that I still observe the duty, established in my school days, of unscrewing and carrying away in triumph the 'Please do not spit's' and 'Penalty for improper use £2'—I do not know how to put this last warning into the plural—with which the companies admonish their patrons. It is characteristic that in my Confucian mood, into which I all too readily relapse, I do my best to make it up to the cheated company, taking tickets to stations beyond that to which I propose to travel and carefully wiping from the seat, and not only from the seat upon which I propose to sit, the muddy marks which other people's boots have made.

But, as I have said, I cannot keep my Confucianism up. The society of the great and powerful, however Confucian the methods which have been adopted to enable me to enter it, always sooner or later evokes an outbreak of Taoism. Sooner or later I begin to feel a cross between a mischievous guttersnipe and a spiritual outcast. For a little time I conform. I do the right things in the right way and I put on the right clothes. But, I find, I cannot keep them right. All too soon, I commit some sartorial outrage, or utter unexpected and inappropriate words. If I have not the courage to say them outright,

## *The Vagrant and Society*

and less and less as I grow older have I the courage, I say them as it were under my breath, mocking not so much the company as my own snobbishness for aspiring to belong to it. Never can I for long escape a feeling of bewildered surprise at my presence in such a society. Never, even at the few great houses where I visit on familiar terms, do I really feel at home. 'What on earth', I find myself asking myself, 'are you doing in this *galère*? By means of what contemptible "string pullings" and "suckings up" did you rise to share these glories?' My Taoist self, it will be seen, is apt to be very contemptuous of my Confucian self, and laughs at this creature who would succeed in the world, all the more because he normally fears and is repressed by him.

### *Reaction of my Contemporaries*

Now it is clear that a creature so fundamentally divided, susceptible in spite of all his precautions to occasional outbreaks of irrepressible vagrancy, cannot aspire to win the trust and confidence of his fellows. The men whom society most honours are those who are safe. To be safe means to do the things that others do and to give the world the answers it expects, not once or twice or for a time, but always. Now although I can do these things for a time, I cannot, as I have said, keep them up. When I conform, it is as if I am playing a part which at any moment I may forget, and it is their instinctive realization of this which, I suppose, causes other men to withhold from me their confidence. With what pertinacity do they refuse to elect me to committees, to include me in deputations, to nominate me for appointments. With what regularity do they pass me over. At school I was made a monitor only in my last term in spite of the fact that I had been for two years in the VIth, and for one at the head of it. At college, Balliol College, I met for the first time other spiritual vagrants. They were, for the most part, of a more normal and recognized type than myself—straightforward artists and Bohemians who made no pretensions to social advancement and had no aspirations for leadership or power. Open despisers of society, they lacked my Confucian element altogether. For example, they consistently made fun of the respectable, the safe, and the eminent, whom my Confucian self cannot sufficiently respect, and openly disdained the conformity after which, for the most part of my time, I so earnestly strive. In particular, they had no desire for the repre-



## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

sentative positions and the elective appointments for which I craved, and which, unaware of the instinctive feelings of distrust which I inspired, I in those days still endeavoured to obtain. There was such a lot of me that wanted to do his duty in that state of life to which it pleased whatever body I served to call me, and punctually and efficiently to discharge the functions of such offices as came my way, for all the world as if I were a normally useful and responsible member of society.

But this was precisely what society would not let me do. In my time at Balliol it was the custom for those who in a particular year were the secretaries of the athletic clubs to be their captains in the next. For one year the secretary did a rather boring job, and in the next he was rewarded by being made captain of the team. Elections to the captaincy could in theory be held, but the appointment of the secretary was taken so much for granted that no elections were held. For a year I was secretary of the Balliol Hockey Club, but the thought of having me as their captain was more, apparently, than my fellow members could tolerate. If they had been asked, they would, I think, have been hard put to it to say why; I was not unpopular; I was fairly good at hockey, and I had been an efficient secretary. Yet so intolerably repugnant was the thought of myself in charge of the hockey team, that against all precedent an election was staged at which I was easily defeated.

### *Ineffectual Efforts to become a Don*

For years after leaving Oxford, as I shall tell in a later chapter, I wanted to be a don. My qualifications were reasonably good, and my applications repeated. Many men were appointed, but I was not among them. In fact, as I subsequently learnt, I never stood the ghost of a chance. Yet I doubt whether those who so persistently turned me down would have found it easy to say precisely why they did so. They knew that I could teach, and I had a reputation for being a good and a clear lecturer. Not was there, I imagine, any suggestion that I might become a common-room bore. I doubt if I was even disliked. The root of the trouble was, I suppose, a suspicion, present more or less consciously in everybody's mind, that I could not be relied upon; relied upon, that is to say, not to commit some indiscretion, whether of speech or behaviour. Of those who would guide the young at Oxford and Cambridge there are required gravity of behaviour and



## *The Vagrant and Society*

dignity of manner. There is a certain approved demeanour proper to the don. Not only must he never do or say what is unseemly, but such saying and doing must never be thought even possible in him. What is unseemly is not easy to define. But those who have been trained in the right tradition know instinctively, just as they know a bad smell. They could not tell you why conduct is unseemly any more than they could tell you why the smell is bad. It just is. An important part of unseemliness, however, is saying something unexpected.

### *A W.E.A. Gathering*

Now it was in this article of unexpected utterance that I was more particularly known to be unsound. I had a bad record in the matter. For example, a party of W.E.A. students is being lodged at Balliol during a summer school, and on a certain evening they are being regaled with a paper on the relation between religion and art. They are gathered informally in a Balliol common-room and have just partaken of the inevitable coffee and biscuits. The reader of the paper is the wife of one of the dons. She is a good, practising, Christian woman whom everybody respects, myself not less than others. I, however, happen to be in an iconoclastic and irreverent mood, and find the paper intolerably soppy and sentimental. Also, it contains, I believe, statements which are untrue in point of fact; for example, as touching the source of the inspiration of the artists who painted the multitudinous Madonnas of pre-Renaissance Italy. Was it, I asked, a feeling of reverence for the mysteries of their religion which they sought to embody in faces of more than human purity and innocence, or was it rather an all too human feeling for an earthly mistress, a feeling which, since there was no patron but the Church, and the artist after all must live, found its natural vent in placing upon canvas the loved features of a beautiful woman in the assurance that the Church would be ready to pay for them, provided that they were cast in the conventional Madonna form?

In the eighteenth century human beings were generally supposed to be ruled by reason; in the nineteenth by economic selfishness; in the twentieth by pride of nation and in the thirteenth and fourteenth by religion. Inevitably, then, every picture assumed a religious complexion. . . . Such and such things I said with a cheerful gusto which suggested a certain pleasure in the saying.

## Spiritual Vagrancy

The truth of these sentiments is a matter of opinion; but there could be no two opinions about their indiscretion. It was, for example, in a pre-war Oxford College, a gross error of taste for a member of the College even to suggest to members of the working class that artists had mistresses: while to say that the mistresses were the source of the Madonnas capped bad taste with blasphemy. At a subsequent interview my remarks were made the subject of severe strictures on the score of levity and irresponsibility, and my chances of an academic post were ruined for years.

### *Trying to be a Civil Servant*

I entered the Home Civil Service and for sixteen years served in a Government office. From the first, I was a ludicrous misfit. I did not dress appropriately—for example, I would arrive at the office wearing a rucksack—I failed to evince a proper sense of my own importance or of the importance of my work, and I made inappropriate and embarrassing remarks at conferences. In interviews with the public, my demeanour was held to be undignified, and I was woefully and manifestly lacking in a sense of responsibility. Above all, I could not hold in my pen, which continuously broke out in writings in the popular press. If a Civil Servant writes poetry, it is forgiven him. He may also be a scholar, provided that his contributions to scholarship are in a realm sufficiently remote. On Chinese pottery, for example, or the history of chess, Civil Servants may and do write works of great substance and value. Such writings are, indeed, encouraged as tending to enhance the dignity of the Service and compensating able and worthy men for the frustration of their ambitions to ameliorate the lot of those whose affairs they are called upon to administer. It was in some such circumstances, I imagine, that Burton consoled himself by writing *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. But what a Civil Servant must not do is to write about current affairs. I did, and, since I was both a socialist and a pacifist, my utterances were very far from being in line with any conceivable official policy. I knew that I was wrecking my career and did my best to restrain myself, but I simply could not help it. The little Taoist devil inside me would have his fun, and sit on the safety valve as I might, out he came and gambolled in print, enjoying himself in a stream of books and articles on God, ghosts, the condition of the Church, the purpose of the universe, the status of man in the universe, the position of women,

## *The Vagrant and Society*

the underpayment of waitresses, the duty of resistance to war, the leaderlessness of youth, the future of morals, and whatever other subject happened to be commended by its topicality to my interest at the moment. In the end I made the Service too hot to hold me, and it was, I conceive, as glad as I was when a suitable excuse for our parting company presented itself.

The foregoing is not intended as a criticism of the Civil Service, an institution for which I have a high admiration. It was forbearing to me when I was in it and generous to me when I left it, but emphatically it was not the place for an imperfectly restrained Taoist.

### *Canalization and Restraint of Taoism*

In those early days, indeed, my Taoism was no respecter of time, place, or person. Ubiquitous and irrepressible, it intruded itself into all my activities, interfered with all my plans, wrecked many of my hopes. Resolutely I would set about the business of courting some eminent and authoritative person, hoping to win his favour on behalf of my own advancement. For months all would go well; the great man was interested and well disposed, and it seemed reasonable to hope that he would recommend me or my work in the quarter desired. Then quite suddenly and unexpectedly I would find him kicking like a frightened horse. Sullen and inarticulate, or articulate and denunciatory he now regarded me, it seemed, with the greatest repugnance. The Taoist had in a moment undone the good work of months of Confucianism. I had said something that had upset him, or he had seen or heard of me kissing a housemaid, or he had come inadvertently on some article of mine, in which I had blasphemed against one of his most cherished gods, affirming, perhaps, that divorce ought to be made as easy as marriage, expressing a preference for the Red Flag over the Union Jack, asserting that lawyers and judges ought to be abolished, prophesying the end of organized Christianity owing to the failure of the churches to pay any attention to Christ's teaching, or even advocating taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously. Whatever it was, it was enough. The careful Confucian work that I had put in during the preceding years was completely wasted.

In middle age I have learnt to keep my Taoism to itself. I am now rigidly departmentalized, a Confucian all the week and a Taoist only on spiritual holidays and Sundays. So pervasive, indeed, has become

## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

my Confucianism, so solid my respectability, so impressive my substance, that I sometimes fear, or rather sometimes hope and sometimes fear, that the spiritual vagrant will die the death of middle age. It is inevitable, perhaps, that one should become respectable as one becomes respected, and the conventional wild oats are not the only ones that the spirit ceases to sow as one crosses the threshold of the forties. Yet although I envisage the end of spiritual vagrancy as a possibility, I do not believe that it will become a reality. There are three circumstances which tend to keep my Taoism alive. The first is the acquisition of substance, responsibility and dependants.

The very fact of increasing substance, while it stabilizes, also irritates me. As my position becomes more assured, as wealth and respectability increase, so do the efforts which I make to escape their effects. The fugitive impulse, in fact, grows with the growth of that from which it is fugitive. Let us suppose that I stay at home and do my duty; I must clear up a mess of over twenty letters a day; I must manage the affairs of a turbulent and importunate family; I must pay the wages and check the depredations of dependants; I must correspond with house agents and landlords and municipal authorities and London stores and women as well as with educational establishments, University authorities, students, publishers, editors, fellow writers, reviewers and literary ghosts; I must see 'callers' or contrive to defend myself against them; I must cope with the importunities of those who seek to induce persons whose names are known to write without payment for the first numbers of new papers, to append their signatures to letters to the Press, to address meetings, to give lectures, to support causes, to be photographed, to be interviewed. Continuously must I give, or refuse to give; for ever am I beset by persons whom I must see or ward off; never am I quite by myself, and never, therefore, am I quite myself. And as all this flotsam and jetsam of a reasonably successful individual's life surges and bombinates about me, as I vainly struggle to keep my head above the surface flow of duties and engagements and succeed only in keeping it just below it, the fugitive impulse, the impulse, that is to say, for a sudden if brief escape, makes itself irresistibly felt and sweeps me away into the country.

### *The Mechanization of Civilization*

Secondly, there is the diminishing accommodation provided by



## *The Vagrant and Society*

modern civilization for what Mr. Lin Yutang calls 'man's slightly rebellious hair and bare feet'. It is not merely that the framework of our lives is increasingly machine-made, that we live a press-the-button existence, doing fewer and fewer things for ourselves and delegating more and more of the activity of living to the machines which, having already taken over the business of working for us, thinking for us, and playing for us, will presently save us the trouble of living altogether, that our towns increasingly encroach upon our country, and that the Englishman is every year harder put to it to find the country sights and sounds, the solitude and the quiet for which the Taoist in him instinctively craves—all these, the results of man's misapplication of his conquest of the forces of nature, are bad enough; but they are not the worst. For worse than any of these is the fact that we have robbed the world of wonder and destroyed the sense of mystery. Surprised by nothing, awed by nothing, the contemporary young person is suffering from an atrophy of the sense of wonderment. The achievements of science may have enabled us to conquer the world, but they have robbed it of much that made it worth the conquering. Never has our planet been so trite and obvious, never so lacking in romance. What is the use of looking through

*magic casements opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn,*

if they are but windows set in the sides of the steamer on which you are taking a pleasure cruise? What is the point of faring 'over the hills and far away' only to find a Woolworth store on the other side? Or where is the thrill of investigating a haunted house for one whom science has assured that ghosts are moonshine, and that every phenomenon has its natural cause? In such a world one must keep alive a sense of the excitingness and strangeness of things, if one is to retain one's spiritual health. Hence one's resort to Taoism, one's exercises in spiritual vagrancy, become a crusade on behalf of the wonder of the world and one's sense of the significance of being one of its inhabitants.

*Let us Eat and Drink for To-morrow We Die*

Thirdly, there is the danger of war. Surveying the European situation in 1936, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that one's chance of dying in one's bed is small. My chance admittedly is greater than



## *Spiritual Vagrancy*

that of the young men and women now coming to maturity. It is to me a matter for surprise that, realizing the facts of the situation—and such realization has never been more vivid or more widespread—they do not rush to practise a 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die' philosophy. For some years after the last war, when the chance of another conflict seemed remote, men embraced what they took to be Epicureanism enthusiastically enough, and dancing, drinking, drabbing and 'sleeping around' were the order of the day. Today, when the sands are running out and their prospects of leisure for enjoyment are fast vanishing, young men show no disposition to make the most of the little that remains. On the contrary they are serious, puritanical, credulous and seem far more inclined to keep step in the barrack-yard with a million others than to tread the primrose path with one. They are, or so it seems to me, a generation of potential listeners and followers, and if the creed is only unlikely enough, the cause sufficiently forlorn, will sacrifice themselves with uncomplaining ardour. Well, that is their business, not mine. For my part, I want to enjoy myself before the end comes, and since I am too old or too sophisticated for the dancing, the drinking and the drabbing, I take it out in spiritual vagrancy. Why, after all, should I spend my life and break my spirit in attempts to conform to a society that seems bent on its own destruction? And so I let my vagrancy have its way, setting aside days of escape in every month when I may make sacrifices on the altar of Lao Tse.

### *Origin and Nature of this Book*

Having made my concession to the claims of the Taoist spirit, I can the better preserve my week-day Confucian respectability, insuring against some unforgivable intrusion of the vagrant into the life of the respectable philosopher by giving the vagrant days to himself. And that, incidentally, is why I have written this book.

There was a time when my official works on philosophy were spoilt by levity. For several pages I would follow my argument austere enough. Then quite suddenly the vagrant would break out in a cascade of borrowed epigrams, a doubtful *double entendre*, or an attack upon capitalism. The lay public would praise the book, but would say what a pity it was that the author from time to time descended from his high level to utter remarks in doubtful taste; the academic public refused to notice the book at all. Well, I have learnt better

## *The Vagrant and Society*

now. To-day I never write a serious book by itself; I always run it in double harness with another. The other serves the academic work as a whipping boy. I use it, that is to say, as a kind of rag bag, into which to tip all the refuse irrelevances and irreverences, all the expressions of irritation and outpourings of spleen, all the overflowings of Taoist bad taste and spiritual scallywaggery which would otherwise have crept into the other and spoiled it.

I have a very serious and most Confucian book on hand at the moment. It will, I hope, add considerably to my reputation. That is why I have decided to write this one.

Part Two

BELIEFS, ILLNESS AND FRIENDS  
OF THE AUTHOR

---

6

PAIN, DEATH, AND THE  
GOODNESS OF GOD

---

*That Misfortunes Prove God's Goodness*

There seem to be no beliefs which human beings, if put to it, are incapable of holding. That the light of the sun will grow dim if priests do not periodically consume human flesh; that the souls of the dying can be caught in nets and preserved in boxes and bottles; that wisdom can be acquired by eating their brains; that sin can be transferred to weeds, or that it can be removed by eating a mixture of cooked flour and water and listening to an incantation; that the lost tribes of Israel have been discovered in the Middle West of America; that only prostitutes can serve God; that pointed toes are an offence to Him; that He dislikes the sight of women's hair in His house, and is outraged by the appearance of female shins and calves—all these beliefs and many more readers of the works of Frazer and Westermarck will discover to have been held by human beings with passionate and intolerant intensity. Some of them the curious reader of the daily Press will discover to be held still. From this collection of intellectual curios there are three which I wish to select for special attention. All three possess the common property of being embraced with an added intensity by persons in trouble.

The first is that misfortune of any kind indicates that God exists and is good. A study of the past suggests that nothing so effectively promotes belief in the goodness of God as a first-class calamity. Let men's crops be destroyed by drought, their cattle be washed away by floods, their towns be demolished by earthquakes, their communities be smitten by pestilence and wasted with famine, and they will be seized by a robust and lively religious zeal which sends them flocking

## *Pain, Death, and the Goodness of God*

into the churches, in order to entreat God to avert further calamities in the future and to thank Him that He has not made them any worse than they are in the present.

It is not recorded that this procedure has had any particularly salutary effects; in some cases very much the contrary. Volcanic eruptions, for example, are more frequent in Italy, where they are much prayed against, than they are in England, where they are prayed against very little; and plague and pestilence, which continuously figured as the main subject of men's prayers in the Middle Ages, occurred far more frequently in the Middle Ages than in modern England, where persons praying mention them perfunctorily or not at all. The case of plague, in fact, would seem at first sight to suggest that prayer has a definitely unfavourable effect, since by flocking into the churches and cathedrals in order to pray for deliverance from its onset the faithful provided the best possible conditions for the spread of contagion.

Being charitably disposed towards the Almighty, I do not propose to accept the obvious inference of an ironic malignity which causes human beings to do themselves harm by reason of their very trust in His goodness, and prefer to suggest that it is to natural causes—for example, the presence of active volcanoes in Italy and the absence of drains in the Middle Ages—that we must look for the explanation of these and similar phenomena, thus absolving God from all responsibility in the matter.

However, my present purpose is not to explain, but to establish the fact that men have only to suffer, for them to conclude that God is good, watches over them and will extricate them; whereas, as every denunciatory preacher from the days of Sodom and Gomorrah to those of post-war England has testified, they have only to enjoy a little prosperity and relief from danger, and religious observance becomes lax, religious faith dim.

*That Pain is not Wholly Evil.* The second belief is that physical pain is not the greatest of human evils, but that, on the contrary, it strengthens the character and refines the spirit. Once we are convinced that it has these beneficial effects, it becomes very difficult for us not to take a further step and conclude that physical pain is sent to try and test us, training and disciplining our characters and thus qualifying us to acquit ourselves creditably on a higher plane of existence hereafter. Thus, like calamity, physical pain also testifies

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

to the good intentions of God, who has kindly consented not only to teach us in this way, but to teach us gratis.

This belief in the spiritual value of pain is one of the most cherished dogmas of Christianity. I have recently had the pleasure of reading some illuminating extracts from Eymeric's *Directorium Inquisitorum*, a text-book, apparently, for inquisitors. Torture, says a commentator on this work, is not merely permissible—it is more, it is praiseworthy; while a Roman ecclesiastic is quoted as rhapsodizing as late as 1895 on the 'blessed flames of the *auto-da-fé*, which, by removing a handful of contemptible creatures of the most treacherous sort, snatched hundreds and hundreds of legions of souls from the jaws of error, and perchance of eternal damnation.'

The reason for this belief in the efficacy of pain is not obscure. If pain were accepted as an unmixed evil, either the omnipotence or the benevolence of God would have to be surrendered. An omnipotent God who permitted pain, when He could remove it, could not be benevolent. A benevolent God who wished to remove it, but failed, could not be omnipotent. God on the first assumption is a sadist; on the second, he must be at best an equal, at worst an inferior. Inferior to whom? Perhaps to Satan. Neither view is acceptable to Christianity.

The third belief is that death is not the end, but is the prelude to a new life. That this belief is held *only* by those suffering from pain or smitten by misfortune I do not of course wish to suggest. It is, indeed, prevalent among most men at all times. But it is undoubtedly heightened and vivified by suffering, and especially by illness. Illness inevitably turns the thoughts to death. For my part, I have only to catch a chill, my temperature has only to rise a couple of degrees, and I begin to wonder whether I am going to die; and many of those who are unused to sickness have told me that, similarly afflicted, their thoughts turn the same way. Now, with most men, or at least with many, to think of death, and still more to be in danger of death, is apparently to become convinced that death is not death at all, but only the threshold of another life. We cannot, it seems, contemplate the extinction of our personalities with equanimity, and so we insist that our personalities are not going to be extinguished. We are, we assure ourselves, about to begin a new life; and, wondering what sort of life that new life may be, we bethink ourselves of the teaching of the religion we learnt in our childhood, with its eternity of



## *Pain, Death, and the Goodness of God*

celestial bliss for the good and of infernal torment for the wicked, and, reflecting upon the sinfulness and the scepticism of our past lives, fall in a frenzy of fear to the task of propitiating a neglected and possibly angry deity. Hence arise death-bed repentances, the priest at the bedside of the dying agnostic, and the shipwrecked atheist on his knees in prayer on the wave-swept deck. These ex-agnostics and ex-atheists are, I suspect, taking out an insurance policy. They do not, even *in extremis*, I imagine, think that there is a God; but, they reflect, it is just possible that there may be. It is the part of prudence to pay a few premiums in the shape of death-bed declarations of faith and some hurried prayers as the ship goes down, as an insurance against the risk that 'there may be something in' the religious racket after all.

*Illness and Beliefs of the Author.* To come now to myself. All my life, hitherto, I have enjoyed good health; I have also enjoyed my life. Justly, in my view, since it has been, I think, as active and as varied as those of most, so active and so varied that I have had little time or occasion to reflect upon such matters as pain and suffering and death, which form the subject-matter of the beliefs I have described. I have been too busy living and—I hope the confession will not set the reader against me—enjoying myself. For one thing, I have always felt and been very well; at least, I was very well until the summer of 1936, when, after having given me a good run for my money, the Lord proceeded to smite me. For several weeks I have been ill and in pain, and at the time of writing I do not know when I shall be better. And so it is that I have had occasion to give my personal attention to the matters about which I have been writing—to experience pain at first hand, to think about death as an event which might conceivably occur to myself, and to try to gauge the effects of suffering and misfortune upon my general beliefs with regard to the nature and purpose of things.

Taking them by and large, these remain—I cannot avoid a certain pride in the announcement—unaltered. I am in general unable to see why the presence of misfortune should be regarded as evidence of the good intentions of the purpose or Being which or who informs the universe; and I am in particular unable to understand why the occurrence of calamity should administer a fillip to people's faith, making them more vividly aware of, more reverently grateful towards, the beneficence of that purpose or Being. My reason tells me

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

that calamity and suffering have no purpose whatever—they are, I believe, just part of the evil of the universe; and that the universe does contain real, objective evil, and that all attempts to explain it away, as being, for example, possessed of a certain disciplinary value, or as being the delusive appearance of what is fundamentally good, or as being the necessary counterpart and condition of good, are the most pitiable rationalizations by means of which men have endeavoured to impose their wishes upon their reasons, I am still, as I have always been, convinced. Whether there is or is not a purpose in things, I do not know, and it is my private conviction that nobody else knows any better than I do. We do not know (let us be frank about it) what is the purpose for which creation travails, why the stars run in their courses, what is the origin and nature of things, what is man's destiny in the future, or what his good in the present. And we do not know why there are pain and suffering. Thus the dictates of my reason. . . .

*The Gods are Jealous.* If, however, I listen to my instincts, they suggest to me broadly what their instincts suggested to the Greeks. There is not a God, but there are many gods—creatures of a human sort, though of more than human stature, and with an all-too-human attitude to ordinary mortals, in whose affairs they take the liveliest interest. Like Jehovah, they are jealous for their own power and dignity, and, like Him too, they become ferociously angry if they think that their power is being challenged or their dignity underrated. Hence they keep a wary eye for possible rivals, and regard with lively apprehension any suggestion that mortals may be 'getting above themselves'—as, for example, by becoming too prosperous, enjoying too much happiness, or assuming too much power. If mortals are so ill-advised as to do these things, then the jealous gods are apt to take them down a peg, thus demonstrating their own power and conveying to arrogant men a salutary hint of their mortal impotence. And so, whenever things are going particularly well, it is advisable to be more than usually on your guard against the jealousy of the gods. It may even be good policy to buy it off with one or two voluntary humiliations—with, for example, the surrender of part of one's income, the temporary abasement of one's self towards those whose position is inferior to one's own, or even by a few good works. Such was the instinct of the Greeks—an instinct which expressed itself in the themes of the great dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles,

## *Pain, Death, and the Goodness of God*

which turn upon the tendency of man's overweening pride to bring down upon him the wrath of the jealous gods. Such too was the instinct of the Chinese, expressed in a hundred aphorisms and worked up into that philosophy of 'lurking', 'lying low', assuming humbleness, and aping stupidity of which I have already written, and such, when visited by misfortune, is my own instinct.

### *Pain is the Ultimate Evil*

Having had some, I still believe that physical pain is an unmitigated evil, the greatest in the world. It does not, I find, strengthen the character, and it does not refine the spirit. In small amounts it makes men petulant and irritable, and if it is bad enough and sufficiently maintained—as, for example, by Inquisitors seeking to persuade heretics of the loving kindness of God—it can destroy all semblance of humanity and reduce men to quivering wrecks of sensitive nerves and gibbering fear. I would beg any one of those who believe in the greater formidableness of mental pain to permit himself to be tied up naked to a post and jogged at carefully chosen spots and at nicely calculated intervals with a red-hot poker, and I would then bid him put his hand on his heart and assure me that he would not, after five minutes of the treatment, anxiously demand to be allowed to undergo any degree and quality of mental pain, provided only that the poker treatment should stop. Unfortunately, the millions of poor wretches who have been burnt and tortured to serve the ends of religion were rarely presented with so merciful a choice. For my part, I would be prepared to give grateful verbal assent to any proposition whatsoever, and even at a pinch do my best to believe in it, if by my profession of belief I could be released from physical pain.

Christians have made light of the body in comparison with the soul. The body they have represented as a mere tabernacle of flesh, tying the soul to earth and retaining it in a kind of chrysalis condition of arrested development. Nothing, therefore, that happened to a body so conceived could be of much importance compared with the fate of the soul, and, if the pains of the former could purchase the salvation of the latter, then the pains should be welcomed. I cannot agree. Whether there is, in fact, a soul I do not know; but that I have a body I am only too well aware, and I am quite prepared to barter a promising future for the hypothetical former in exchange for a relief from the present and certain pain of the very real latter. But,

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

though we do ill to despise the body, we may at least resent it—resent it for being a so much more efficient instrument of pain than of pleasure. For the performances of the body in the matter of pleasure are incomparably inferior to its performances in the matter of pain. The great drawback to all those theories of conduct which in one form or another make pleasure the end of life is pleasure's extreme transitoriness. With the best will in the world you simply cannot keep your pleasure up. Smell a flower, and the pleasure of the second sniff is less than that of the first. There is some nerve, I suppose, involved in the smelling which quickly tires; at any rate, the enjoyment is soon over. And so it is with all the pleasures of the body. What is familiar is no longer felt as a pleasure, with the result that the rich pleasure-seekers who exploit all the resources of civilization in the cause of bodily gratification find that the appetite for pleasure grows faster than the means of satisfying it.

With pain how different! It is not merely that the capacity for feeling pain does not tire with its continuance; it actually grows. For a time you do your best to hold out, calling upon your resources of energy and courage, or deliberately diverting the mind with some positive stimulus—by playing chess, let us say, or by writing. For a time you succeed. But there comes a moment when the pain breaks through the so carefully built-up defences. With a rush the barriers go down, and it has you at its mercy. Thus the capacity for pain grows with what it feeds on, and the torturee who, buoyed up with faith, withstands the torture nine times gives way to the same torture on the tenth. A churlish trick this, to have tied the spirit to a body so constructed that, though its capacity for pleasure is intermittent and transitory, its capacity for pain is developing and continuous. I cannot believe that a good God would have played it.

Ah, but pain, you will say, has a biological value; it is a danger signal; without it we should run risks against which it warns us. Risks of what? Presumably of death. But this is to excuse the greater evil because it warns us of the lesser. For, though I loathe and fear pain, I do not feel particularly afraid of death. I do not want to die; indeed, as I have already hinted, I enjoy my life. But I would far sooner die than suffer. That pain is an evil I know, for I have experienced it. Whether death be an evil I do not know, for I have not experienced it. Many of those who share most of the views just expressed feel an assurance that death is extinction. I think it pos-

## *Pain, Death, and the Goodness of God*

sible, even probable, that they are right; but I cannot share their assurance. For what happens after death is unknown. Probably it is unknowable, and I prefer to bow to the unknowable instead of, like many Rationalists, cutting it dead. Hence I should wish my attitude to death to be that of Socrates. When his friends expressed surprise that he showed neither fear of death nor grief at its prospect, he pointed out that such emotions were irrational and, therefore, degrading to sensible men; for, since we do not know what happens to us after death, we do not know whether being dead is better or worse than being alive. Since it is as likely to be the former as the latter, joyful expectation is neither more nor less rational than fear. It is, therefore, the part of the wise man to feel neither the one nor the other, but with calmness and serenity to meet the unknown. As for praying to God when in misfortune, I will have none of it. I used once to try it when in a difficulty; but, finding God an ever absent help in time of trouble, I have given it up as a bad job.



## VISITORS, MYSTICS, FRIENDS, DOCTORS AND OTHERS

---

### *Justice is Done at Last*

So much for the negative results of my illness. On cosmic questions it has not changed my opinions; it has not, that is to say, led me to postulate the existence of a creative God, to deduce that He is good, or to conclude that suffering is unimportant and death illusory. But disbelief in the existence of a benevolently interested and interfering deity does not entitle a man to claim credence for his opinions on matters of practical concern, and in regard to matters of practical concern illness has introduced me to certain phases of experience to whose importance I had until recently paid little attention, because, my body having hitherto behaved itself, they had remained outside my sphere of first-class interests. I have been led, in fact, to devote most of my attention to my relations with my fellows, which, being chiefly interested in ideas, events and sensations, I have been apt hitherto to take rather for granted.

First, as to my friends. In the matter of visiting, my friends have behaved well. When I had been in bed for some seven weeks, I grew interested in the number of my visitors, and began to count them. Up to that time there had been sixty-eight. I was impressed; impressed and flattered. Presently, however, I began to be assailed by doubts. Had they really come for my pleasure, or for their own? Many, I was prepared to concede, had visited me from sheer kindness of heart. Others came to give me good advice—advice which frequently took the form of admonition. 'Here', I can imagine them thinking to themselves, 'is a man who has rather notoriously insisted on going his own way; on going it and on having it. He has broken the rules, flouted the conventions, ridden rough-shod over people's feelings, snapped his fingers in the faces of the prudent and the worldly-wise; and hitherto, to the public outrage, he has got away with it. He has been physically active and vigorous and is good at games; he has a reasonable financial competence and is said to be lucky on the Stock Exchange; he has a certain name as a philosopher and a publicist,

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

and his books achieve a certain popularity; he is reputed to be successful with women; above all, he has enjoyed rude and abundant health. And now at last nature has struck and he is brought low. How eminently right and proper! Justice has been done; arrogance punished; "uppishness" snubbed; the proprieties vindicated; the prudences justified. A man may break the rules and tempt Nature ninety and nine times and she will not turn a hair, but let him tempt her the hundredth and she will suddenly rise in revolt and drop on him like a load of bricks. She resisted a good deal of temptation before she decided to drop on this man, and now at last she has dropped "good and proper". High time too!

It is rarely that we are able to endure the misfortunes of our friends without fortitude, and my visitors were very brave with me indeed, for, reasoning unconsciously on the lines I have indicated, they felt in their hearts that justice had been done and they could not, I suspected, but feel glad that it had been done. And so their conversation was apt to take an admonitory turn—"If you had gone to bed earlier, you would not have been so ill"—"If you had not lived so hard, you would have had more resources with which to combat your disease"—"If you had not eaten such rich food, the disease would not have taken such a hold"—"If you had a trained nurse, you would be better looked after"—"On no account must you permit yourself to go out with a temperature"—"You will need to go away for a very long period of complete rest" (this envisaged removal of a competitor always gave great satisfaction) "before you are fit to start work again". . . .

### *Ministrations of a Psycho-therapist*

Sometimes, however, the admonitions were more specific. As my illness progressed, I was astonished to discover how many of my friends had private panaceas up their sleeves; how many knew of cures that were patent, cures that were certain, cures that apparently cured everything. Sober, sensible men, hard-headed and realistic, whose minds I had hitherto respected and whose intellectual toughness far exceeded my own, no sooner approached my bedside, than I became aware of a curious buzzing sound which appeared to proceed from the direction of their heads. Scarcely did they open their mouths, when out of them the bees came swarming, the bees of medical fads and dietetic whimsies,

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

Let me cite the case of my old friend A. Scarcely had the news that I was laid up reached him, when he descended upon me, and proceeded to tell me what was for my good. He lost no opportunity of impressing upon me the psychological origins of my malady. Admittedly, I was infected by a germ, but then we all harbour germs, all kinds of germs, and harbour them all the time. Why had this particular germ prevailed against me and prevailed at this particular moment? Answer, because my resistance was low. Why was my resistance low? Because of psychological strain and conflict, probably sexual in origin. But I was, I assured him, suffering from no particular strain or conflict, at least I knew of none. That, he pointed out, only made matters worse because my ignorance showed that the conflict and the cause of it had been repressed into the unconscious where, festering malignantly, they had gradually lowered my powers of resistance until they had made of my body a suitable harbourage for virulent germs. In the circumstances the only remedy was the thorough cleansing of my unconscious, involving the removal of the cause of the conflict. This could be most expeditiously effected by the ministrations of a psycho-therapist whom he promised to bring to call on me the next time he came in the near future.

A duly returned, accompanied by X who was sympathetic and asked me a number of probing questions touching my relations with my parents in early infancy, the first occasion on which and the circumstances in which I had seen the private parts of (a) males and (b) females, how and when I came to know the fact concerning the bringing of babies into the world, my relations with my first nurse, and so on. My answers to these questions seemed to him to have a significance bordering on the sinister, and he sufficiently prevailed upon me to persuade me to go and visit him in his consulting room so soon as I was better.

I have sombre memories of these visits. The psycho-therapist opened the door and without a word of welcome or even of recognition, ushered me into his room. (He was, as I subsequently discovered, obeying some rule which warns a therapist against establishing personal relations with his patient; the therapist must remain aloof and impersonal, like God.) He requested me to lie down on a couch, retired himself behind a screen and then bade me talk to him, 'What about?' I asked.

'What you are thinking about; whatever is in your mind.'

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

Usually I am not at a loss for conversation but this exhortation banished thought and dried up words. I could think of nothing to say.

'Tell me', he said, 'about your childhood.'

I told him all that I could remember; it was not much and it seemed to me appallingly dull. Then I described my father and mother and descanted on my friends. Then I fell back on what I had done that month, that week, that day. By the eighth visit I was so gravelled for fresh material that I was driven to recounting the numbers of all the buses I had seen on my way to the consulting room. Then I recited nursery rhymes. The eighth visit was my last. The strain of thinking of something that might be of interest to the psycho-therapist was altogether too much for me.

### *The Author Meets a Mystic and Mounts a Hobby-Horse*

I come now to the case of C who was solicitous for the welfare not of my body, but of my soul. C is a mystic, and a very formidable mystic too. He has an excessively noble appearance, a charming manner and considerable business competence. I first met C while staying at a Guest House in the country. We were the only two men in a houseful of women, and though C neither smoked nor drank, we fell naturally into talking together after meals. I shall not easily forget our first conversation. Its subject was the imminence of world war. I remember making the customary point that the next war will, from all accounts, put an end to our civilization altogether. From this I broadened out into a dissertation on the wickedness—or was it the folly?—of mankind, the volume of pain and evil in the world, some of it wilful, some of it apparently inescapable, and the impossibility of reconciling the facts as we know them with the supposition that an infinitely compassionate Being is watching over and guiding us, or even with the milder hypothesis, that some purpose not ourselves is working in and through us for good.

Pain, wretchedness, starvation, oppression, injustice, torture, lingering disease and sudden death—these were the things, I insisted, that had made up the typical human life. Look backwards over history and you will find scarcely a period, however brief, when men have not been fighting and killing each other; when insecurity has not been the common human fear and grinding toil and bitter struggle the common human lot. Most of those who have lived have not had enough to eat, or to drink; they have had insufficient

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

warmth and inadequate shelter, and have been the slaves or hirelings of those upon whose whim their own lives, and the lives of those whom they held dear, depended. We know only too well how capricious the whims of the powerful have been; how grossly men in power have abused their power. Even to-day, I concluded, most human lives would not bear contemplating. They were tired and boring lives weighed down by brutalizing toil, or dulled by monotonous routine relieved by trivial amusements; and, inevitably, they were lived without zest or gusto.

I cannot remember what C said in reply, but I know that it was singularly unconvincing. Indeed, in the argument that followed, I harried and pursued him all over the dialectical field and finally declared him intellectually bankrupt, palpably bereft of any device of reasoning or shred of information with which to comfort himself or to oppose the torrent of argument, fact and invective with which I overwhelmed him.

### *Unconvincingness of the Author*

As I drew to a climax, I became aware of a curious feeling. It was not merely the feeling that I was not convincing my opponent—that, I am bound to confess, is an all-too-common experience of mine when I am, so far as I can see, handsomely winning an argument. More important and in the last degree surprising was the feeling that I was not convincing myself. These things that I was saying were all of them true and yet, meeting C's serene and untroubled gaze, I was suddenly made conscious that they were not the whole truth, that they were not even the part of the truth that mattered. There was more in life than the misery and pain and wickedness upon which I had so gloatingly descanted. And 'the more' was of such infinitely greater importance that in perspective 'the troubles of our proud and angry dust' sank into insignificance; so much so that, if I read C's look aright, it was almost an error of taste to have mentioned them.

Presently C spoke. 'I do not', he said in effect, 'expect you to believe what I am going to say—how could you, when the evidence upon which it is based is hidden from you?—but I know for a fact, know it as certainly as I know that I am sitting here, that there will be no general European war on the scale of the last one, and that within a reasonably short time'—he was speaking at the end of April 1936—'the affairs of mankind will have taken a turn for the better.'



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

There is, C went on to affirm, a certain rhythm in the affairs of the Universe, and, in the light of his knowledge of this rhythm, he felt able confidently to predict that the forces of evil, which had had admittedly a long run for their money, were about to recede, the powers of good to advance. It was this anticipated early advance of the powers of good in the world which precluded the possibility of war.

I expressed gratification at the conclusion, but could not help confessing that I would feel greater confidence in it, if C would be so good as to enlighten me as to the nature of the evidence on which it was based. What, in fact, were his grounds for believing in a rhythm in the affairs of the Universe, in forces of evil, in powers and spirits of good, and in all the rest of his mystical paraphernalia? What justification indeed was there for this whole way of talking and thinking?

### *The Author Demands Instruction in Mysticism*

C replied that he had access to sources of knowledge which were denied to the great majority of men and women. I must not, however, misinterpret him and jump to the conclusion that these sources of knowledge were denied to ordinary men, because they were ordinary; anyone who was prepared to subject himself to the necessary disciplines and to master the necessary technique could have access to them. Moreover, his feet would be set upon a way of life which was infinitely superior to that which most men were now living. Wasn't it then, he asked me, worth while making the effort to obtain this knowledge and to master this superior technique of life?

What, I wanted to know, did making the effort involve? It involved, I found, to begin with, the abandonment of smoking, of drinking, and of meat-eating. I jibbed at the outset. For my part, I said, it was not worth while; life was too short. How, indeed, could it be worth while for me to make these very real sacrifices, unless I shared C's faith, and since I could not share his faith, unless I had his knowledge, and since I could not have his knowledge, unless I had access to his sources, and since I could not have access to his sources, unless I had mastered his technique, and since I could not master his technique, unless I first made the necessary sacrifices, it seemed, I said, that I was enclosed within a vicious circle.

What is more, I went on, we are all of us, we wistfully agnostical intellectuals, enclosed within the same vicious circle. We are guide-

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

less and faithless, and would fain believe: yet no creed that can win the assent of our intellects is offered to us. And when we are told to suspend the operations of our critical intellects and to accept on faith what we cannot accept on evidence, we answer that we cannot accept anything on the basis of something that we have not got; that if, indeed, we had faith, our present difficulties would never have arisen, but that, unfortunately, the recipe for the generation of faith is unknown.

### *C Springs a Surprise*

The dilemma is a real one and I put it to C as forcibly as I could. C, however, had a surprise in store for me, a double surprise. 'I know', he said, 'only too well what you are thinking. You are thinking that here is another woolly-minded mystic who lays claim to a kind of knowledge not attainable by the ordinary methods of the intellect, yet, when pressed for it, is unable to give any account of it or of himself; that it is easy, when one is beaten on the intellectual plane, to take refuge in dogmatic assertions based on evidence which is believed to be beyond the reach of the intellect; that those who are weak in the head are only too ready to cry sour grapes at the more rigorous faculties of the mind and, lacking reason, to decry reason's authority and to vaunt instead the claims of revelation and intuition. Mysticism, in fact, is the fool's last ditch.'

'Agreed,' said I. 'Most mystics I have met have been fools. For the very fact that it cannot give an account of itself at the bar of the intellect makes mysticism the prey of every crank and every quack who seeks to compensate for his palpable inferiority of common wit by claiming a superiority of private vision.'

'Well,' he conceded, 'I am quite prepared to believe that the alleged mystics you have met have afforded you good enough grounds for the low esteem in which you appear to hold them.'

'That such men exist, I know only too well, and I must try to show you that I am not one of them.'

'It may interest you to know that for twenty years I played match-chess in good circles. I played top board for North London, and there was even talk of trying me for England. I have more or less given the game up now—I have no time for match play—but I am still a pretty strong player. Well, I challenge you to a series of games, not for the mere glory of beating you, or the pleasure of demonstrat-

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

ing my superior strength, but in order that I may extort from you a sufficient meed of respect for my competence on the intellectual plane to induce you to pay some attention to my announcement that there is a plane beyond the intellect. You, it seems, only recognize the intellectual field. I challenge you, then, to meet me on it, and, when I have beaten you, I shall expect you to accept my guidance when I try to lead you out of and beyond it.'

### *C as a Chess Player*

I am disposed to fancy myself as a chess player. When I was in my early twenties I played for a county, and for a long time after that I took part in match play for Civil Service teams. I have given up competitive chess for some years now—the games are too long and the company too dull—but I doubt if my ability as a player is much less than it was.

In the months that followed, and particularly during my illness, I played a number of games with C. It was apparent from the first that as a player he was in a different class from myself. It was not so much the fact that he beat me—although he did this regularly and with ease—as the style of play by means of which his victories were won that surprised me. While I relied on tactics, he was a master of strategy; while I sought for niggling advantages, he played for position and a 'mate'; while my policy was provisional and my methods empirical, he planned from the first a campaign which, through all the complications and involutions of development was not only inspired and sustained by a dominating purpose—the overpowering of the opponent—but embodied a consistently pursued, though infinitely adaptable, plan for the accomplishment of that purpose.

When a game was finished, he would play it through again, telling me at each point not only what moves he made—for my memory was sometimes at fault—and why he made them, but telling me also of the various alternative moves which had occurred to him, and the lines of development which he had envisaged as severally ensuing on the assumption that he had adopted these alternatives. He also explained to me what moves I should have made, had he in fact adopted one of these alternatives; and also, though with consummate tact, what I should have done, but did not in fact do, in reply to the moves which he actually did make. It was a display of virtuosity which delighted the intellect no less than it humbled the pride

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

of the opponent, and I hope that my chess has been sensibly improved.

'And now,' said C in effect, 'perhaps you will be prepared to listen to me on certain other matters that lie between us.'

### *The Author Takes Lessons and is Baffled*

I could not, it was obvious, do less. Professing his own inability to instruct me in the mystic way, C proceeded to send me literature. This took the form of a sheaf of little blue pamphlets which were devoted to the discussion of such questions as *The Continuity of Consciousness* and *If Christ Came Back*.<sup>1</sup> Out of respect for C, and as one keeping a bargain, I did my level best to read these pamphlets, but I found that I could make nothing of them. They emanated from a consciousness totally foreign to my own. Written in a style of apocalyptic revelation, they did not reason, they did not argue; they simply announced. Expressions were used—for example, 'O Church . . . He whom thou hast sought [The Christ] comes clothed in the Light of His Radiant Countenance. His Auric Glory reveals where thou art'—which to me were totally meaningless; statements were made, which acceptable perhaps to faith, were totally unsupported by evidence—for example 'These intimate ones [disciples and intimate friends of the Lord] were to appear on the planes of this world about the time of His Return, just as in the far-away days of the Manifestation amid the Syrian Hills, the Highways of Judæa and Samaria. His reappearance would coincide with the restoration of the Christ message'—personages or beings invoked under such titles as 'The Father-Mother of All Souls', and organizations introduced, such as 'The Societies of Therapeuts', whose very title was a question-begging enigma. Few of the statements made in the pamphlet seemed to me to have any meaning. The following is a typical utterance:

'The Master accounted Himself the Servant of the ADONAI for the manifestation of Christ, and the unveiling of the sacred Mystery of the Father-Mother. As the vehicle of the Revelation, He was illumined by the Eternal Light and clothed in His Being with the Glory of the Divine Love and Wisdom; and these were radiated through His Aura.'

Admittedly I am quoting passages out of their contexts; but I can

<sup>1</sup> Both by J. Todd Ferrier, privately printed for The Order of the Cross.



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

assure the reader that I, who was privileged to read the contexts, was in little better condition to assimilate the passages than he himself, who is asked to swallow them raw.

When I glimpsed through the vagueness, or thought I did, a core of meaning, there seemed to me to be no reason whatever to think it true. There seemed, for example, no reason why it should be true to say that consciousness 'is a polarized state of the Divine Elements within each one: for each Soul is fashioned out of the Divine Ætheria', or that God 'has not been able to convey to us all the blessings that His Love would fain have conveyed to us . . . because of the planetary conditions.'

I explained these difficulties and doubts to C. If I was perplexed by his literature, he was perplexed no less by the fact of my perplexity. It was all as plain as a pikestaff to him. How, then, could it seem so singularly like nonsense to me? Our mutual bewilderment was not diminished by the recognition, a recognition handsomely conceded on the part of each of us, that the other was not a fool. But we were clearly at a deadlock, and I think our intercourse would have come to an end, had it not been for C's second surprise.

### *Necessary Limitations of Argument*

I have already remarked upon C's comparative inferiority in argument. This was not, I thought, entirely due to dialectical incompetence. Argument, he had admitted, was not his *forte*, but, even if it had been, I doubt whether, holding the position that he did, he could have made much of a show; for in the controversy between the mystic and the agnostic, between the man who affirms purpose and benevolent spirit at the heart of things, and the man who is not prepared either to affirm or to deny anything at all, the most convincing arguments are all on one side. And that is not the side of the mystic. I once wrote a book of Letters with Arnold Lunn, entitled *Is Christianity True?* Lunn wrote as a Christian, I as an agnostic. Lunn argued exceedingly well. I was surprised and even disconcerted at the force and cogency of the case he put up. And yet, when all was said and done I must, writing as an entirely biased person, record my no doubt entirely prejudiced opinion, that Lunn hadn't an intellectual leg left to stand on. I beat him, in fact, *hands down*, as I should be prepared to beat anybody who tried to support by reason a position resting upon faith.



## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

The fact that all the best arguments are against religion does not in itself constitute an argument against religion. It is important, I think, to make a distinction between those positions which are true and those which happen to be easy to defend. That the arguments for a position should be easy to state and have a *prima facie* convincingness when stated does not necessitate the truth of the position which they are designed to support. All that such arguments can accomplish is to make the position seem plausible. Now a plausible position is not necessarily a true one.

Conversely, there are a number of positions in support of which no argument which will bear two minutes' critical examination can be brought forward which, nevertheless, may very possibly be true. Take, for example, the case for free will. Free will is a subject that will not bear thinking about, for directly you start to reflect upon it, you find that every consideration that occurs to you constitutes an argument against it. Determinism can marshal a dozen different arguments in its defence, arguments so cogent as to produce the effect of having proved its contentions to demonstration, whereas free will has not a shred of argument with which to clothe its naked assurance that it is a fact. And yet it *is* a fact, a fact which we know independently of argument.

### *Absence of Arguments for Religion*

I hope I have said enough to convince the reader that, though an argumentative person, I am not disposed to overrate the power of argument. I am anxious to establish this conviction in his mind because I am now proposing to assert that, so far as their argumentative plausibility is concerned, the fundamental positions upon which religion insists seem to me to be in no better case than free will. You can take them one by one, the position that God exists and is good, the position that pain is not wholly evil, the position that death is not the end, and show that, as I have already hinted, they outrage every canon of probability, that they are strictly incompatible with known facts, and that there is no reason whatever to think them to be true. It is often asserted that the fundamental contentions of all the world's great religions are the same. All assert that there is a creator, that He is God, that God is good, that the Universe is a unity and a spiritual unity, that evil is illusory, that the human soul is immortal, that its present condition is no less transitory than it is

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

unfortunate, and that it will one day be transmogrified and attain either the peace of an eternal and blessed serenity, or the glory of a constant communion with the Almighty.

Very possibly! It is, I am prepared to concede, very possible that all the great religions of the world do assert precisely these things. But it does not seem to me to be very likely that they are true, and I cannot see that any cogent reasons have been given for thinking them to be true.

As for the tenets which are peculiar to particular religions, their intellectual status seems to me to be even more dubious. That God is three persons and not one, that bread and wine can be transformed into substances of a different chemical constitution by special processes, that a substance called the Soul leaves the body at death, that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, that He ascended visibly into Heaven, that Eve had a conversation with a Serpent, and so on, are propositions whose truth cannot be established by any known method of reasoning or process of verification, and for which no convincing grounds have ever been adduced.

How, then, it may be asked, did they come to be formulated?

### *The Basis of Religious Experience*

What is common to all the religions is, I think, a certain kind of experience. This experience is distinctive and unique, just as our experience of music or our feeling for nature is distinctive and unique. Now an experience which is unique is strictly indescribable. For to describe is to give an account of the thing described in terms of some other thing, and if the thing described is unique, such an account is bound to falsify it. Nobody, so far as I am aware, has succeeded in giving a satisfactory account of the experiences that great music<sup>1</sup> or nature evoke in him, and nobody has been any more successful in describing or conveying the nature of the feeling which is the core of religious experience.

Yet the feeling is not just a feeling. If it were, religion would be a purely subjective experience, as subjective as my liking for strawberries, my dislike of marzipan, and my repugnance for men with

<sup>1</sup> Listen, for example, to the expressive Pepys's description of music: 'It ravished me, and, indeed, in a word, did wrap up my soul, so that it made me really sick, just as I have been formerly, when in love with my wife.'

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

red hair who wear Panama hats. In expressing my liking for strawberries and my dislike of marzipan and of red-haired men in Panamas I am, it is obvious, making a statement about myself. Nobody supposes that there is a quality of intrinsic likeableness which characterizes the strawberries, or of intrinsic dislikeableness attaching to marzipan and to red-haired Panama wearers, a quality which my mind apprehends and my judgments of liking and disliking report. When I make these judgments, I am not, strictly speaking, reporting anything at all external to myself. I am simply reporting my own reactions. And I am reporting them in a sphere in which such remarks as 'I don't know anything about marzipan, but I do know what I like' are just and appropriate remarks and constitute all that can be truly said.

Now many people hold that religion itself belongs to this sphere. They hold, that is to say, that in religious experience the mind apprehends nothing external to itself, but projects, for its comfort and assurance, figures of its own imagining upon the empty canvas of a meaningless universe, figures which at first bearded, personal and irritable become, at a later stage of development, impersonal and vaguely purposive, and then proceeds to acclaim as the underlying reality of the universe the creatures which it itself has imagined and projected.

It may be that this view is correct. If it is, then religious experience belongs to the realm of purely subjective feeling, the realm of which my feelings of liking for strawberries and disliking for marzipan are inhabitants. Religious experience cannot, on this view, be true or false any more than the dislike of marzipan can be true or false. Its status is purely psychological; all that we can say of it is that it occurs.

### *Religion Involves a Kind of Knowledge*

But I do not believe that this view is correct. The essence of religious experience seems to me to consist in a kind of knowledge. Essentially, the seer, the mystic and the sage, essentially even the common man in his moments of illumination, know something; something, that is to say, which is not a fact about themselves, but a fact about a world external to themselves. What is it that they know?

It is extremely difficult to say. That the everyday world with which

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

our senses acquaint us is not the only world; that it is, on the contrary, only an appearance of another world that underlies and transcends it; that this other world is wholly good in a sense in which the everyday world is partly good and partly evil; that it is pervaded by an intelligence; that this intelligence is infinitely holy and worshipful; and that it has benevolent intentions and purposes which have a relevance to our own everyday world, and may ultimately lead to the complete supersession of the everyday world.

So far as we ourselves are concerned, there is a realization that our ultimate destiny is to be found not in this everyday world, but in the real world whose existence religion reveals. From this real world we have, by some inexplicable and regrettable mischance, been parted; to it we may one day hope to return; or rather, to it one part of our being may hope to return. For by reason of our normal participation in, and intercourse with the everyday world we have a second nature, an everyday self, which masks and overlays our real nature, our spiritual self in virtue of which we inhabit the real world. Finally, our everyday self, the self of which we are normally conscious, has a limited vision, is, indeed, partially blind; and because of its blindness is responsible for the condition of ignorance in which we normally live unconscious of the existence of the real world and of our own participation in it.

These things I suppose, or some of them, are what the mind of man may be said to know as the result of religious experience, to know that is to say, as opposed to feeling merely. For the knowledge of them is, of course, accompanied by feeling, a feeling of reverence and awe for the wonder and the majesty and the infinite goodness of the underlying reality, or of the spirit that pervades the underlying reality of which, in our moments of religious insight, we are made aware.

### *Impossibility of Communicating Religious Knowledge*

Now since men do, indeed, seem to have this knowledge, knowledge which appears to them to be of the greatest moment, they naturally seek to communicate it to other men. This they can do only by formulating the content of their knowledge in a series of propositions. The creeds and dogmas of authoritarian religion are the results of these formulations. And, it is obvious, as formulations they are grossly inadequate. In the particular form in which they are stated they are, as I have suggested in the last chapter, almost cer-



### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

tainly untrue, and they succeed in conveying practically nothing at all of the quality of the religious experience on which they are based. The announcements that 'The Master accounted Himself the Servant of the ADONAI for the Manifestation of Christ, and the unveiling of the sacred mystery of the Father-Mother'; that 'as the vehicle of the Revelation, He was illumined by the Eternal Light and clothed in His Being with the Glory of the Divine Love and Wisdom', and that 'these were radiated through His Aura'<sup>1</sup>—announcements which are contained in one of C's pamphlets—may, I am prepared to concede, be attempts to render in intellectual terms knowledge obtained in mystical experience. But the announcements convey absolutely nothing to those who have not shared the experience. The information which the mystics seek to communicate by such unfortunate expressions as 'a dazzling darkness', or 'a delicious desert' is only an extreme example of the difficulty that besets all attempts to communicate religious truth. Language is an evolutionary product with a severely practical intention. It was invented to enable men to survive and to develop in the everyday world of solid objects extended in space and enduring in time. It is, therefore, an instrument devised to express the needs and to convey the meanings appropriate to this world; and, inevitably, it fails, if it is required to convey the meanings appropriate to another. Religious truth, if indeed there be such a thing, is truth not about this world, but about another world, a world which is different from this one, and language, therefore, breaks down when an attempt is made by its means to express this truth. Dr. Johnson grasped the point with his usual penetration and stated it with his usual vigour. If, he said, commenting upon the ecstasies of a metaphysical poet, Mr. X has experienced the unutterable, Mr. X will do well not to try to utter it.

And so, though I am prepared to agree that religious experience is not entirely subjective, that it is not pure feeling; though I am prepared to concede that it is an experience of something other than the moods and ideas of the experiencer, and that it contains, therefore, a core of knowledge, I do not think that this knowledge can be successfully conveyed in a series of propositions to which the intellect can be asked to give its assent. I do not think, in other words, that it can be formulated in creeds. But there are other ways of communi-

<sup>1</sup> *If Christ Came Back*, p. 19, by J. Todd Ferrier. (Lund, Humphries & Co.)



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

cation than those of the intellect. It is not only by propositions that meaning can be expressed. It can also be conveyed in action, which brings me back to C and to the second surprise which he had in store for me.

### *The Example of a Life*

And C's second surprise was simply this, that, as I came to know him, I realized that he was a better man than any that I had met, at any rate for a very long time. Goodness I believe to be indescribable, and I shall not, therefore, attempt to say in what C's virtue seemed to me to consist. It was not merely that he was unselfish, good-tempered, serene and kind, though he was all these things. More important, perhaps, was the impression that he conveyed of moral strength. Here, you felt, was a character which no shock of circumstance could disturb. It was not merely that the man had contentment. You felt that, whatever might happen to him, he would retain his contentment.

Living in a world in which most people are discontented unless they have some positive reason for content, and in which, therefore, they go out of their way to invent positive reasons—parties and theatres and motor tours and dinings out and love affairs—for the contentment which otherwise evades them, I could not help being forcibly struck by the difference in this respect between C and the general run of my friends and contemporaries. It was a difference entirely in his favour. Could it be, I wondered, that there was after all something in this religious business, and that the difference between C and the general run of people that I knew was due to the fact that C had faith while the others had not, and that C expressed his faith in his way of life, thus testifying to the truth of the religious business, by behaving as if it were true?

### *To Live as if Religion were True*

The hypothesis was at least worth consideration, and the attraction of curiosity was now added to the pleasure which I took in C's company. What was it, I wanted to know, that he had that I had not? Since it was clearly something that was valuable, could I, by any manner of means, succeed in acquiring it? It was, I realized, at this point if anywhere that the vicious circle, to which I have referred above, might be broken. Unless you have faith, you have no reason

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

to think that what the religions assert is true. Unless you believe what the religions assert, you have no motive for acquiring faith. Such, I have suggested, is the wistful agnostic's dilemma. But did not the obvious superiority of C as a person, the manifest serenity of his character, the confident assurance of his attitude to life, supply such a motive?

It would, I thought, be very nice to be like C. Why, then, was C such as he was? Because, apparently, he had faith; because, in fact, he believed. Would it not, then, be as well to act as if one too believed; to behave as those who had faith behaved, in the hope that by dint of so acting and behaving the justification for this way of life would presently become apparent. By living as if religion were pragmatically true, might one, in short, not come to see that it was true absolutely? The foundations of one's faith were, admittedly, not at present laid, but by building the superstructure one might come to see that it had foundations.

### *Alleged Value and Purpose of Illness*

I had reached this point, when I fell ill. Inevitably, I called for C and he came. He was the best of sickroom visitors. He was very charming, he beat me well and often at chess, and he talked as always about the country. But he was also admonitory. 'This illness', he said in effect, 'has been sent to you for a purpose. The purpose is, in the first place, to give you a breathing space. You live your life at such high pressure that you never relax; you are so immersed in the things of this world, ideas and causes and writing and speaking and personal relations and playing games and eating good food and drinking good wine and trying to make your name and become a celebrity, that you have neither energy nor leisure to see beyond this world. You are so busy thinking, that you have no time to stop and think; so busy talking, that you have no time to listen. Now you have got to stop, you have got to listen, whether you like it or no. The machinery of your life has for the time stopped rotating, and, now that the wheels have ceased to whirl, you may perhaps be able to listen to something else. Normally, I assure you, are you like a man deafened—deafened by the stir and bustle of your own activity. Sit back, then, and be content to be quiet and to listen.'

I asked him what I was to listen for. 'That', he replied, 'depends. Some would say, for the music of the spheres; but, perhaps, it would

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

be better to drop what is, after all, only a metaphor and say that, after having given out for so long, you are now being given the chance to take in. In order that you may take in, you must make yourself as receptive as possible to the influences that are waiting to play upon you. For, if I am right in thinking that this illness has been sent to you for a purpose—and assuredly nothing happens purposelessly—then it provides you with a chance that you can on no account afford to miss. If you will but seize it, you may find that your whole outlook on life has been changed. You may see beyond this world to the reality which underlies it, and so come to view the things of this world in their proper perspective. Be grateful, then, and make the most of your chance.' I asked him how I was to set about making the most of my chance. 'First', he said, 'you must relax; relax physically, since physical relaxation will make it easier for you to relax your mind. You do not know how to relax your mind, and you must learn. At present, you are taut; even your muscles are taut. Now I, for instance, can relax in such a way that I can put myself to sleep in five minutes.'

### *Unregeneracy of the Author*

This seemed to me to be a most enviable feat. What precisely, I asked, did he do? 'Well,' he said, 'I begin by relaxing the muscles at the back of my neck. I let my neck swing loose like this,' and he proceeded to give a demonstration. I tried to do the same, not very successfully, I am afraid, for I slept no better than before. I tried to listen to the music of the spheres, but I heard nothing out of the ordinary. I tried to make myself receptive to all the influences that were waiting to play upon me, but I only became the more conscious of my pain. The same fate attended all my efforts to improve and reorganize myself. I tried very hard to think that my illness had been sent for my benefit; that pain was doing me good; that I was being given a heaven-sent chance to discover myself and to discover heaven. But the only result was the persistence of the unregenerate reflections which I set down in the last chapter. In spite of persisting unregeneracy, I am grateful to C. Of all my visitors I liked him, I think, the best. I still think that he possesses something that I do not, but would like to possess, and I am exceedingly sorry that my efforts to follow in his footsteps have so lamentably failed.

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

### *The Invalid Looks at the World*

Being ill, I found, curiously alters one's estimate of people. Those in whose company one normally revels leave one drained and exhausted. Those normally regarded as dull are found to soothe and to strengthen. Invalids are notoriously egotistical. One's interest is so concentrated upon the events occurring in one's body, that one has little left over for what is happening outside it. My illness synchronized with events of first-rate international importance; civil war in Spain, controversy over intervention, the unblushing equivocations of the Fascist powers, and the manifest acceleration of the drift of Europe towards war. There were also the Fascist troubles in the East End. It is, I think, true that I accorded to these public calamities something less than my usual meed of fascinated horror. There are no public worries, said Dr. Johnson; there are only private worries. As a sick man, I agreed with Dr. Johnson.

Nevertheless, speaking as a biased person, I doubt whether I was as egotistical as most invalids. At any rate the degree of interest which I felt in my visitors, the degree of pleasure that I took in their company, was not solely assessable in terms of their willingness to talk about me and my pains. A conventional acknowledgment of the fact and importance of my illness I, of course, expected, and I was prepared to swallow with unction reasonably large doses of compassion. But, quite soon, I wanted to hear of other things.

Now it was when they came to talk of other things, that my friends surprised me.

Those who talked with ease and opportunity of men and affairs exhausted and bored me. Those who gossiped intimately and rambly of common friends, or of shared enjoyments in the past, pleased and soothed me. The reason for this shift in the direction of my normal interests is, I suppose, that illness diminishes one's rationality. The sick man, in fact, is less reasonable than the healthy, and rationality, as I shall try in a later chapter to show, is to be defined in terms of the area of the universe which one considers relevant to one's interest and suitable for the exercise of one's compassionate concern.<sup>1</sup> But I doubt if the hypothesis of my diminished rationality covers all the ground. If it had only been talk about myself that I wanted, the explanation would have been simple enough; invalids, as I have said, are notoriously egotistical. Again, if the

<sup>1</sup> See Part IV, Chapter XII, p. 175.



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

impersonal talk of politics and movements, of music, books and ideas, in which I normally take pleasure, had continued to please me, there would have been no call for comment. But what, I found, I most enjoyed was something between the two, that is to say, personal gossip of a feminine kind—and, I am sorry to say, the more malicious the better. In fact, as an ill man I enjoyed hearing scandalous stories about my friends and improper stories about everybody and everything. I even developed a taste for Limericks. What, oh what, would C have said?

### *Evading Management*

The one kind of visitor whom, I found, I could not stand at any price was the managing visitor. All my life, people have sought to manage me. Masters at school strove to give me a code of conduct, prescribing to me what I should do and what not do; spiritual pastors a set of beliefs, announcing to me what was true and what not true; women a sense of dress, impressing upon me what was worn and what was not worn; while socially ambitious wives have tried to lever me into society, briefing me in the matter of who was to be known and who not to be known. By a variety of methods, ranging from hypocritical evasiveness to pig-headed obstinacy, I have contrived to elude most of these schemes for my management. I did not behave like most public schoolboys, or honour what they honoured; and, if I could only find out what they believed—not an easy thing, by the way, to discover—I feel pretty sure that I should find it is not what I believe; I dress abominably and always have dressed abominably, and emphatically I do not know the right people. Most of the people who have tried to manage me have now given me up as a bad job. But when I was ill and helpless, they began on me again. It is difficult not to feel a sense of superiority to those who lie prostrate before one, and it is difficult, apparently, to resist the temptation to tell them what they ought to do about their prostration.

### *E takes charge*

There was, for example, nurse D. But nurse D only lasted twenty-four hours and common charity forbids me to speak of her further. More interesting was the case of E. Presenting herself at an early and alarming stage of my illness, she proceeded to take things in hand. E is by temperament an actress. She likes to have an audience, even



### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

if it is only in the gallery; and, in the absence of an audience, she plays to herself. She now saw herself in the role of the competent, knowledgeable woman of action, taking charge of a distraught household and telling it what to do. She was ostentatiously humble and helpful, and did not mind doing some of what had to be done herself: and so efficient was she, that it was impossible to avoid noticing—we all noticed, and so did she—how much better she did it than anybody else. Her proposals were conceived on heroic lines. You must, she said, have skilled attention, attention that you cannot get at home. Also you must have trained nurses. It was not fair to myself to lie there inadequately attended by amateurs; what was more, it was not fair to the amateurs. How tired they were getting! How completely they were at the end of their nervous tethers! In the sickroom they kept cheerful faces; in the sickroom there was quiet and order. But outside it! I could not, she hinted, conceive the disorder and confusion that my illness had caused. I could not, but she could; and she *alone* could. Only *she*, she conveyed, knew how serious things were. The household, in fact, was at sixes and sevens. Women passed sleepless nights; women fainted. Indeed, it was only because of the unremitting character of *her* efforts, the continuous exercise of *her* care and forethought—hinted at rather than stated, but, nevertheless, successfully brought home to me—that the disorder had not invaded the sickroom, that my meals arrived, my medicines were administered, my poultices and bandages duly applied.

And as for herself? She was only too glad to do anything for me, her friend, but, as her suffering countenance plainly demonstrated, it was martyrdom, nothing less, that her friend's inconsiderateness was inflicting upon her; and turning her sorrowful, yet infinitely compassionate, face full upon me, she besought me in all our interests to go into a nursing home. A nursing home, nay twenty nursing homes! Twenty nursing homes and twenty doctors and fifty trained nurses and God knows how many ambulances. Nothing less, it was indicated, was demanded by the needs of the situation.

I felt that I would sooner die than go to a nursing home, dug my heels into the bed and, with the mulish obstinacy of the invalid, lay lumpishly where I was. E was hurt. She had seen herself as the one person who had risen to the emergency, gained the prize for devotion and initiative, taken charge of the situation, and amid the plaudits of friends and acquaintances carried it and the patient off to a trium-

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

phant culmination in a West End nursing home. But she was defeated by my mulishness and, finding that she could not dominate the scene, she left it. So much for E. There were a number of little E's who tried, albeit on a less ambitious scale, to manage my illness for me. None of them, however, was very successful.

### *Praise of Friends and of Doctors*

Looking back over what I have written, I cannot avoid the suspicion that it reads a little churlishly. For the reader, I am afraid, the suspicion will be a conviction. What an ungracious fellow is this, he will think; people come to visit him when he is ill—always an ungrateful task—and the only thanks they get is to be crabbed in his book. All right: let it be as you wish. I *am* ungracious, as ungracious as the sick animal who snarls at the hand that seeks to tend it. And yet I cannot deny myself the pleasure of taking the wind out of your sails by putting on record my conviction that many of those who came to see me did so out of pure kindness of heart; that I was exceedingly glad to see them; that I was properly, was indeed abasingly, grateful to them for coming; that I enjoyed their company, and, when they had gone, congratulated myself on having so many kindly and devoted friends, who were willing to go out of their way to cheer me up when I was dull and miserable, and would uncomplainingly make a boring journey to Hampstead in order to see a boringly egotistical invalid at the end of it.

Besides, there were my doctors. I propose to pay a tribute to my doctors, a tribute which is all the more admiring when I remind myself of the disabilities under which the wretched men labour.

### *Absurdity of Medical System*

For just consider the drawbacks against which a doctor must contend. There is, first of all, the absurdity of the system under which he is called upon to work. This system, under which persons who are ill call in doctors to cure them, and then proceed to pay the doctors on the basis of the elaborateness rather than the success of their cure, is an outrage upon common sense and a challenge to common dishonesty. It makes illness an asset in the patient and puts a premium upon knavery in the doctor. For (1) if all persons were continuously well, then, under the present system, doctors would starve. (2) If all persons were allowed to become so dangerously ill that any of them

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

might at any moment die, and many of them did in fact die, the incomes of doctors would suffer from the diminution in the numbers of patients. It is, therefore, to the interest of doctors to ensure that nobody should be quite well, and that nobody should be ill enough to be in danger of dying. It is, in other words, to the interest of doctors that everybody should be slightly unwell, or that they should think that they are, even if they are not. A system which makes ill-health and valetudinarianism conduce to the advantage of those whose professional business it is to cure the former and to eliminate the latter, is obviously foolish. Suppose, for example, that I have a pain in my tummy and that I do not know its cause. To simplify matters, we will suppose that there are two possible alternative causes of the pain, which we will call respectively X and Y. If the cause is in fact X, the pain can be adequately dealt with by a few doses of liver salts. If it is in fact Y, it will yield only to an operation which will entail five weeks in a nursing home and the payment of handsome fees to doctors, surgeons and anaesthetists. In other words, if the cause is X, the doctor receives ten shillings for consultation and advice; if Y, a number of doctors and of the hangers-on of doctors receive between forty and fifty pounds. I am not suggesting that doctors are so dishonest as to say that the cause is Y when they know it to be X, although such cases have occurred. What I am suggesting is that in cases of doubt, which are frequent, when it is far from clear whether the cause is X or Y, we provide doctors with the strongest possible incentive to opt for Y. That is to say, we provide somebody with the strongest possible incentive to cut us open. This is to introduce the system of payment by results, when the results most highly paid are the exact reverse of those which we wish.

#### *Chinese Policemen and English Doctors*

In China at one period—it may still be the case, for all I know to the contrary—policemen were paid by results. If there were no results, there was no pay. Now for results criminals are essential. The policeman's livelihood depended, therefore, upon the existence of criminals. But in order that there may be criminals, there must be crimes. Having first provided the crimes, the policemen then proceeded to provide the criminals by arresting innocent men and torturing them until they confessed to the crimes which the policemen had committed. Sometimes the commission of a crime was not

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

thought to be necessary, and men were arrested and tortured until they confessed to imaginary crimes. The police were then paid for apprehending the criminal.

That this is a silly system is obvious to the Western mind; it is silly because it gives men a vested interest in crime. Under the Chinese system, when there is no crime, policemen starve. Moreover, the more numerous the crimes, the more wicked the criminals, the richer the policemen. Read 'diseases' for 'crimes', and the system is in essentials that which obtains in this country. Our medical system gives men a vested interest in disease. When there is no disease, doctors starve. Moreover, the more numerous the diseases, the more elaborate the treatment, the richer the doctors.

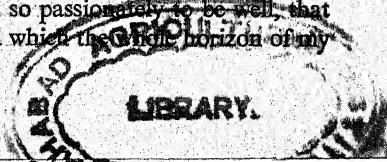
The remedy is obvious. I should compulsorily enrol all doctors as State servants with conditions of service and pension modelled on those obtaining in the Civil Service. Every general practitioner would be responsible for the health of all the people living in his particular area. It would be his duty to examine each of these people once a year, whatever the state of his or her health, with a view to satisfying himself, if they were healthy, that they would be likely to remain so, and if they showed symptoms of any disease, to nip the disease in the bud, before it had time to develop.

### *The Divinity of Doctors*

As if all this were not enough, there are two additional disabilities under which a doctor must labour. The first disability is himself; a doctor is a man who spends his life dealing with people who are below par. Many of them are in a state of abject terror; all of them in a condition of grovelling dependency. How difficult for the doctor not to assume the airs of a monarch and the mantle of a prophet! How difficult for him to keep his head and not to outgrow his spiritual boots! His patients beseech him to be God and ask for a sign. How difficult to refuse the temptation, and to refrain from giving it! It is, in fact, harder to be a modest doctor who neither poses nor pontificates, than to be a modest priest, scientist, parent, teacher, lawyer, or politician. My doctors, all credit to them, achieved this difficult feat.

The doctor's second disability is the patient.

Like all patients, I grovelled. When I was in pain, I wanted so desperately to be relieved, when ill, so passionately to be well, that the doctor became the centre round which the whole horizon of my





### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

interests revolved. He was the object of my hopes; the meeting-place of my desires; the repository of my interests. For it was he and nobody else who could relieve my pain and make me well. And so the doctor's visit became for me, as for every invalid, the peak and crest of the day; to it all events led up, from it they declined. Admittedly, I liked my doctors. But even if I had not done so, I would have made every effort to charm them, for to charm is to propitiate, and a propitiated deity is more likely to work miracles. At the worst, he may be induced to vouchsafe a little information. And so I discussed their families; evinced a passionate interest in the way they spent their holidays; respected their opinions, and sought to share their tastes so successfully that by a strange alchemy I presently came to identify myself with those upon whom my well-being depended. I really wanted to meet their families, was really excited by one's proposals for spending August under canvas, and waxed enthusiastic in good earnest over the other's musical preferences and prejudices. And all the time I was hating myself for doing these things; hating myself not for hypocrisy for, as I have just explained, there was no hypocrisy, but for my humiliating dependence, my abasing emotional absorption. It is natural to resent one's dependence; natural, when it is over, that one should wish to revenge oneself upon the person on whom one has depended. Even while the absorption persists, it is not whole-hearted; there is a part of one which resents it and wants to take it out of the person or thing responsible for it. And so it is a very great tribute indeed that I am paying to my doctors, when I say that, now that I am comparatively well—for by this time it will have become apparent to the reader that I have more or less recovered—I still respect and like them and enjoy their company. Admittedly, I no longer retain the full intensity of my former interest in their pursuits; admittedly, I no longer regard their tastes as constituting the sole standard of æsthetic value. My doctors, in short, are no longer gods but men. But that a god should dwindle into a man and still retain respect, says a good deal for the man.

#### *The Philosopher in Pain*

So much for friends and doctors! Now for myself. Many people hold that philosophy ought to apply to life, and seeing a philosopher who was ill, they did not hesitate to tell me so. 'Bring philosophy', they exhorted me, 'to bear upon your pain'—and 'then,' I suppose,



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

'then you will not feel it, or perhaps, you will not mind feeling it.' I have already expressed myself on the subject of the evil of physical pain, and do not wish to add here to what I said in the last chapter. I cannot, however, deny myself the pleasure of insisting that of all the rationalizations by means of which human beings have sought to disguise from themselves the stark, inexcusable horror of pain, this, that pain can somehow be conquered by power of mind, seems to me the most pitiful. I heard what seemed to me then, and seems to me now, the final comment upon it in my Oxford days. A group of us were sitting at Balliol for a scholarship examination. The subject was philosophy. The conditions under which the examination was conducted were magnificently gentlemanly. We were not invigilated; we smoked tobacco and drank tea at the expense of the future winner of the scholarship, and for three days we wrote at length and at large upon the problems of the universe. The last day was devoted to a philosophical essay, the subject of which was the Stoic maxim, 'The good man can be happy even on the rack', an ample subject demanding from the examinee, expansive treatment. And that we might the better expand, we were given four hours to write upon it. There was, however, one among us who, dissatisfied with his performance in the previous papers, and rating his chances of scholarship winning as of small account, found himself unable to tolerate the prospect of writing for four hours on such a palpable and outrageous falsehood. He wrote, therefore, simply 'If he were a *very* good man, and it were a *very* bad rack this might be true; otherwise not', and handed in his paper. I agree with this remark, nor do I think it can appropriately be added to.

### *Alleged Advantages of a Well-Stocked Mind*

I should like to place it on record that being a philosopher helped me, so far as I can see, not one iota to tolerate my misfortunes with equanimity. On the other hand, being a cultivated person did, for being a cultivated person means that you have habits of reading and writing, and of these the former at least is of great utility to the invalid. One of my doctors bade me thank my lucky stars that I had a well-stocked mind. Nobody, he said, succumbs so utterly to illness as the man whose mind is empty. I do not think that this was well put. The suggestion was, I imagine, that I was to feed on the resources of my own mind, and was fortunate in that these were plenti-

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

ful. A lady put the point even more emphatically. 'If you are temporarily disabled', she wrote, 'you have such wonderful resources to draw upon. Think of all the people who can only do jig-saw puzzles; then think what you have got in the way of a mind to be ill with, like a river flowing and rushing from its source towards the sea of truth. There are still pools in it where you can look down and down and see fat, contemplative trout with their noses upstream and little jokes of minnows darting in and out, streaks of sunlight through the water, and down below great shadowy rocks of wisdom and knowledge. All for you to enjoy.'

Well, well! It is, of course, possible that my mind is like that, but I doubt it. I would not, however, be prepared certainly to affirm that it is not, since I have hardly ever taken stock of it, or considered whether it is a pool of wisdom, or whether, as I hope and think, it serves merely as an instrument for obtaining information and then reflecting upon it. I am not by nature given to introspection. I rarely look within, and, when I do, am so frightened by what I see there, that I look outside again as quickly as I can. Hence the suggestion that I should feed on my own stores of internal nourishment was one of the most unfortunate of all those that were made to me. For to be thrown helpless on the resources of my own mind is, for me, to be thrown into a stagnant pool, where I lie muddy, bored and miserable until some nice, bright little happening, a shaft of sunlight with motes in it, the sight of a pretty face, the receipt of a flattering letter, the most artless of compliments, or a good dinner, come to rescue me from myself. Enough, then, of the alleged resources of my mind.

#### *Gratitude to Literature*

I was, however, grateful to the habit of reading, and more grateful still when the well-known itch came back to my fingers to set me writing, which I presently began to do in the teeth of every sort of obstacle—with a hand too weak to hold a pen for more than five minutes at a time; with a head throbbing with aches and a body pulsing with pain; interrupted by doctors with long faces and nurses with artificially cheerful ones; distracted by medicines, washings, poultices, bandages; incommoded by lack of desk or table, by gross incompetence in the management of substitute bed-rests and bed-desks, and a complete inability, when lying propped on an elbow, to produce marks on the paper whose meaning even I could afterwards

### *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

decipher. In spite of all these things, I went on doggedly writing. Heroism? Not at all; only restlessness coupled with an inability to break habits.

As for reading, why does everybody suppose that, just because a man is ill, his brains become addled and he develops a taste for garbage? I do not know. Yet I put it on record that from the moment my illness became known to my friends, the house became a target for bombardment by the class of literature known as 'bloods'. A 'blood' is a story about crime. Its strength, such as it is, lies in horror and excitement, and it is usually abominably written. Some detective stories qualify as 'bloods'. The detective stories of Freeman Wills Croft I enjoy. They are distinguished by an intellectual precision and an attention to detail of which a logician might well be proud. But for the rest, this stream of hog-wash that poured into my library, adorned for the most part with blooming jackets upon which girls struggled in the grip of clutching fingers, trembled before Chinamen, or writhed in the coils of snakes, was felt by me to be such an insult to the literary and philosophical inmates who normally have their home there, that I caused it to be diverted through a pipe into a wheelbarrow, where it was taken to the garden and suitably burnt—I have spoken of it as hog-wash and described it in similes appropriate to fluid, but I have no compunction at all in mixing my metaphors and telling you that it burnt, for so flamboyant was it that it nearly set fire to itself—under my personal inspection from the library window. The library having been purified, I proceeded contentedly to read George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens and Trollope.

### *Admirableness of Author's Life*

For the rest, being neither philosophic, nor patient, nor able to relax, nor capable apparently of attending to the music of the spheres, nor receptive to invisible influences, I spent my time longing to be well. I longed to be well with a passionate intensity which put every other feeling out of court. It is said that some people enjoy being ill, and pretend to illnesses they have not got in order to attract attention to themselves. Presently they come, in good earnest, to have the illnesses that they think they have but have not, by dint of thinking that they have them. My only comment is, how dull and boring the lives of these people must be that they should be prepared voluntarily to forgo the arduous and pleasures of living in order that

## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

they may lie in bed. How little attention they must normally receive, if it is worth their while to be ill in order that they may receive more!

For my part, as I lay helpless, and the everyday activities of my normal, healthy life passed before me in a row of pictures, flitting across a brightly lit screen, I could not help but reflect how infinitely varied, amusing, attractive, entertaining, instructive, elevating and useful the pictures appeared. Music and nature, long walks in the country, dining pleasantly with women at little restaurants, exchanging ideas with men like-minded with myself, lecturing, orating to audiences, sitting up half the night to work, playing tennis, playing chess and playing bridge, going to Paris to eat and drink, picking flowers in spring and mushrooms in autumn, bathing in coves in summer, riding horses in winter—what fun it all seemed, and how I longed to be restored to it.

### *Moral Obliquity of Illness*

This passionate longing to be well, although the chief, was not the only psychological concomitant of my illness. You cannot, at middle age, for the first time in your life lie in bed helpless and in pain for two or three months without undergoing some change. The changes in my case seemed little enough. Indeed, in the sphere of belief, as I have already tried to explain, they were so small as to be non-existent. But what of my character? It deteriorated, I think—not much, but a little. For example, I became more temperamental. My first impulse on feeling ill is to lurk; that is to say, I first pretend that nothing is the matter with me, hoping that the feeling will pass, and, then if it does not pass, I shut myself away somewhere, until it does. This impulse to shut myself away was in its origin quite unthinking. It is the impulse of the wounded animal. Since, however, I reached maturity, it has been reinforced by a belief for which, if challenged, I can produce so little evidence that I must suppose it to be little more than a rationalization of the impulse. The belief is Samuel Butler's, that physical illness is morally wicked. Butler's readers will remember how the Erewhonians talked openly of their addiction to theft, appealed for sympathy because they had forged a cheque, and, when suffering from fits of bad temper, called in the family 'straightener' to correct them. But when disease was afoot, they lowered their voices and averted their eyes. They shrank from the discussion of illness as the height of indelicacy, hid themselves away at the slightest



## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

suggestion of a cold, and carefully guarded themselves against any hint of their disgrace reaching the ears of their friends.

My instinct is that of the Erewhonians. Unsympathetic to illness in others—I am so impatient of it in my own household that its members are driven to disguise their symptoms for fear of provoking my derisive and embittered comments—I am thoroughly ashamed of it in myself. I pretend to myself that I am well, go on going about my business, and run grave risks of making myself worse by my refusal to take to my bed. When I do take to it, I do so privily, hoping I may get better before anybody finds me out. And in bed I lurk till my troubles grow too great to be borne any longer, whereupon I begin to bleat pitifully for succour and compassion. Upon those who are prepared to administer them, I become totally dependent. In fact, once my defences are down, the completeness of my surrender is proportional to the stoutness of my previous resistance, and my dependence on others is absolute. But for the fact that it is absolute I can never quite forgive them. I can never quite get over my feeling of grievance against them for having seen me brought low, resenting their knowledge of my weakness as the criminal resents the observation of his crime.

### *The Author becomes Temperamental*

Now this resentment persists through, and in spite of, my dependence and produces a disconcerting changeableness of mood. At one moment, I am all gratitude; I realize and appreciate the self-denying devotion which is being lavished upon me, and I am shamed by my own feeling of unworthiness. At the next, I am growling with resentment at my dependence, and snap like a wounded dog at the hand that seeks to bind it. This oscillation between gratitude and surliness makes me a singularly difficult invalid. Like most people, I am made irritable and crotchety by pain—by pain, that is to say, in small doses, for, as I have already pointed out, great pain produces not an irritable human being, but a quivering mass of tortured nerves and flesh which, as the pain grows, loses all title to humanity. But in my case the natural ill-temper of the sick man, pestered by his aching body, is exacerbated by the resentfulness born of my feeling of guilt.

Apart from the capriciousness of mood which this feeling of guilt engenders, when ill I am, in general, weak and womanish. My will power is sapped and my rationality diminished.



## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

### *The Author's Programme for Living*

Normally, I try to plan my life as a whole. I try, that is to say, taking as my unit a period of some days or even weeks, to engage during that period in as many of those activities which I consider to be good in themselves as I can contrive to introduce. These activities are broadly those connected with the pursuit of truth; the increase of fame; the enjoyment of beauty; and the experiencing of intrinsically pleasant sensations. I ought perhaps to add—I wish I were in a position to add—activities devoted to the pursuit and increase of moral virtue, since I consider moral virtue to be an end in itself; but since, unfortunately, I have never discovered the recipe for its engendering, at any rate in myself, I am constrained to omit increase in moral virtue from my programme of activities. I would like to cultivate virtue and to be a better man, but I simply do not know how to do it.

The carrying out of this long-term plan of living involves a certain amount of self-discipline. Always to keep an eye on the future means often to deny oneself in the present. A number of immediately obvious attractions have to be resisted, a few ardours and endurances to be faced. The execution of the plan entails, for example, working for six or seven hours every day since I have not, I find, the wit to keep myself amused except for comparatively short periods, and have discovered that work is the only kind of activity that I can tolerate in any but the very smallest doses. It entails not seeing many of the people who want to see me, and insisting, even at the cost of considerable personal inconvenience, on seeing the people that I want to see, however little they may want to see me. It entails spacing my theatres, cinemas and concerts so that there is never more than one of them in any one week; allotting to myself a certain allowance of country sights and sounds and resisting in the interests of my allowance all temptations to stay in town, and restricting my gluttonous pleasure in food and drink to the enjoyment of one good meal a day.

### *Advantages and Disadvantages of Long-Term Planning*

The wise man never acts, says Aristotle, save on a balance of considerations. I agree. What is more, I have found it advisable to include among the considerations which are relevant to the performance of particular actions, an advance survey of the actions I am likely to be performing a week, or even a fortnight, hence. The

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

disadvantages of this course are obvious. The attitude of the long-term planner is, for example, open to criticism on the score of being cold and calculating. He can rarely, it must be conceded, permit himself to act upon impulse, and there is inevitably, therefore, a certain absence of zest and gusto in his activities. He can rarely, for example, see a friend when the impulse takes him. His time-table for that day, and for many following days, is already full and he must make a date three weeks hence. Now in three weeks' time the impulse to see his friend may have faded, and the spontaneous pleasure of indulging an impulse becomes the savourless obligation to perform a duty.

Nevertheless, however censurable in youth, the long-term attitude is on balance the most appropriate in middle-age. Unless he is a complete fool, the middle-aged man ought to have learnt by experience what are the things that he really wants and likes. And if to include in his life as many of the things that he really wants and likes as possible involves a certain amount of long-term planning and denial of satisfaction to the impulses of the moment, he must put up with the planning and denial as best he can. For this, after all, he will say to himself philosophically, is what life in London in the twentieth century entails. It is only in heaven that one can do what one wants to do without prejudice to the other things that one wants to do. And so I have learnt to school myself with a reasonable amount of success to resist temptations to indulge immediate impulses in the interests of maximum satisfaction over a long-term period. The schooling involves the constant exercise of will and the no less constant activity of the practical reason. It was this schooling with its resultant discipline and restraints, so hardly acquired, so carefully observed, that, I found, was undermined by illness.

### *Sapping of Author's Will Power*

Take, for instance, the case of the will. Continually, I found myself unable to resist those minor temptations against which in health I am proof. I would invite to see me anyone who wanted to come and, broadly speaking, when they wanted to come. The result was a surfeit of bores and a dearth of charmers. The uninteresting came often and, clashing with the interesting, frightened them away.

There are no such difficult social situations as those that occur at the bedsides of the sick. People belonging to different classes, people with different political opinions, people who were known personal

### *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

enemies, people without a taste or interest in common, country cousins and smart townees, met at my bedside and had somehow to be managed. The resultant social contretemps are very hard upon the sick who, inevitably diminished in respect of their social competence, are further rendered miserable by their inability to cope with situations that so obviously require management. Over and over again, I was left drained and exhausted by the clash of jarring personalities, simply because I could not resist the temptation of volunteered visits by friends of all sorts and conditions.

As a fattening middle-aged man, I normally exercise some control over my diet. So much so that, as I have already explained, my gluttony is constrained to do the best it can for itself on the basis of one good meal a day. As a sick man, I was permitted to eat what I pleased; but wine was denied me. Perhaps it was to make up for the absence of wine that I fell so wildly and so indiscriminately upon my food. I consumed cocoa, chocolate, chops and pastry and, being deprived of my usual allowance of exercise, put on flesh at an alarming rate. Ordinarily, I try to do exercises to keep myself fit, although the performance, at the best of times, is, I admit, half-hearted. To do exercises alone in one's bedroom and in cold blood is a dour, flat-footed sort of proceeding. As a general rule, I should say that it is only those who are fit enough to have no need of exercises who possess the will-power requisite for their performance, while those who need them, just because they do need them, lack the necessary resolution. I have seriously studied my Hornibrook, and endured the belly-presses and other bodily rigours recommended by that admirable cultivator of the abdomen for a few weeks, or even months, at a time. But I have never been able to keep them up. As an ill man, I lost even the power to do such exercises as were possible, such as breathing exercises, voice-production exercises and anti-lipping exercises.

My reading, again, was indefensibly self-indulgent. Normally, I permit myself a scheduled allowance of books that I really like, such as Victorian novels, reading them in due proportion to the books that I must review and the books that I must read in order to keep up to date. When ill, I ceased reviewing, omitted to keep up to date, and battered shamelessly upon Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot, Trollope, Jane Austen, and H. G. Wells. I grew sentimental, too, and lacked the will-power to resist charitable appeals from the poor and requests for the loan of books from those who, I knew, would never

## *Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

return them. I even, with some dim hope of propitiating the deities, my doctors, contributed to the funds of a hospital. Pavlov's dogs, it will be remembered, forgot all their carefully built-up inhibitions and salivated indiscriminately when out of sorts or distracted by strangers.

### *Rationality Diminished*

As with my will, so with my reason. The planned attitude to life which I have sketched requires that one should continually be taking into account considerations which are not immediately relevant. The willingness and ability to take into account not immediately relevant considerations constitute, in my view, the essence of rationality.<sup>1</sup> Animals respond only to the stimulus of the moment; savages think only of the neighbours, the tribe and the gods; women and uneducated persons of the neighbours and the family. The reasonable man is he who perpetually keeps in mind all the interests, needs and affections of his life, however remote they may be from the circumstances pressing upon him at the moment. Even when he consents to live in that moment, he continues to take thought for the morrow. I have made some little progress in the art of being reasonable and, as I have explained, try never to act save on a balance of considerations.

When ill, I shamelessly indulged the impulse of the moment. Whatever offered itself to me as being immediately attractive, that I did, without reference to its consequences or its relation to other things not immediately practicable which I considered to be equally or more attractive.

When at last I began to get better, this bad habit persisted. I accepted every invitation to address societies with or without payment, and to spend week-ends with or without bores. I consented to see whoever proposed to call; I agreed to go walking or riding with whoever was willing to accompany me. I even acceded to the suggestions of whatever publishers chose to make me offers, irrespective of whether I wanted, or was able, to write the books they proposed. And a fine mess of things I made in consequence. For months my energies were devoted to getting out of the scrapes into which the unreflecting ebullience of illness had landed me, and to contracting,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 185-187 for an expansion of this dictum.



## *Beliefs, Illness and Friends of the Author*

how expensively, out of the arrangements to which my moments of febrile expansiveness had committed me.

### *The Author's Admirableness*

Cross, irritable, temperamental, moody, weak-willed, self-indulgent, irrational, alternately crawling with gratitude and surly with resentment, I do not imagine that as an invalid I have cut a very pretty figure. That the reader may not form too gloomy an impression of the author, and in the hope of softening his displeasure and mitigating his contempt I add two postscripts.

First, I propose to make a bid for his admiration.

When I was ill, all the pleasures of life were denied to me; wine and women, tennis and golf, country walks and country pursuits. I could not move, write, play games, make love, or drink wine; for a time I could not even read. As I lay helpless, there flitted before my mind the brightly lit panorama of my ordinary life seeming, as I have described, so varied, so enjoyable, so infinitely worth while. What was the vision of lost joys that chiefly haunted me? The vision of drinking, of making love, of going to parties, of addressing audiences or of playing games? Not at all. It was the vision of walking by myself in the country. Should I ever, I asked myself, again climb a hill, push my way through a hedge, lie in a June meadow, rustle the dead leaves in a wood, sit on a stile and look down on a village, or smell a bonfire on a fading October afternoon?

Now that, I think, was very nice of me, and very creditable too.

Secondly, I appeal to his compassion. When I had been ill for several months, it began to dawn on me that I did not mind my deprivations as much as I might have expected. Deprived of all that I had so passionately desired, so carefully chosen, so strenuously fought for; deprived, indeed, of all that had made my life worth living, I was less utterly destitute and downcast than I should have supposed. Naturally I wanted the things that I cared for, but on the whole I contrived to remain tolerably cheerful without them. Now why? Because of the patient heroism of my spirit, the strength of my character, or the consolations of philosophy? I hope that I have said enough to dismiss any such suggestion from the reader's mind. My comparative tolerance was, I concluded, due to the fact that I was well set in middle age. The fires of youth were beginning to burn low, its passions to fade. I simply did not want, as much as I used



*Visitors, Mystics, Friends, Doctors and Others*

to want, the things which I wanted, and so I did not mind so much, as I would once have minded, being deprived of them. And with that realization I was revealed to myself as one who had passed the peak of life, and had already set foot on its declining slope. •

*Part Three*  
**HE COMPLAINS OF CIVILIZATION**

---

8

**DEUS EX MACHINA**

---

*Introduction on Board Ship*

'Daddy, come and see the engine!' It is the invariable, the inevitable demand of my son on first boarding a ship, and not only of my son but of my daughters, of my uncles, cousins and aunts, in fact of two-thirds of the otherwise adult passengers. The waves are afire with the setting sun, the lights are twinkling in the houses on the hill, the harbour is gay with fishing smacks sailing to their anchorages. Upon all these beautiful things we must turn our backs in order that, descending into the hot bowels of a ship, we may stand precariously upon a metal bridge, contemplating in an atmosphere fetid with oil, chunks of metal monotonously performing their unmeaning revolutions. I say 'we'; but in fact I have not descended. I am merely introducing a diatribe against the worship by my generation of machines.

*The Present and Prospects of Machines*

I have no objection to machines as such. Indeed, I applaud their use. They do dull and drudging work, and thus release human beings for the pursuits of the good life. Or should do. When I praise the few civilizations of the past—fifth century Athens, Renaissance Italy, and eighteenth century France—civilizations which were tolerant of new ideas, receptive to beauty, not ashamed of intelligence, given to the discussion of matters which did not personally concern the discussers, I am met with the reply, 'Yes, but these were civilizations of the few, founded upon the misery and toil of the many. The existence of a leisured class, able and willing to concern itself with the life of the mind and the activities of the spirit has always been dependent upon the slavery and serfdom, upon the semi-starvation and brutalization and robotization of millions of toiling men and women.' Very likely!

## *Deus ex Machina*

But the necessity for the toiling and brutalized millions no longer exists. Let the machines take the place of the slaves, and we can begin to be civilized without a qualm. We can, but do we? Honesty compels me to admit that we do not. For, instead of treating these things that we have made as servants who will do for us the dull and drudging work which we do not want to do for ourselves, we have allowed them to become our masters, masters who dominate our thoughts, set our standards, absorb our interests, and form our tastes so effectively, that Samuel Butler's suggestion that the machines may constitute the next level of evolutionary development and be destined to supplant man who evolved them, as surely as man has supplanted the animals from whom he evolved, no longer belongs to the realm of caricature and fantasy, but has become a sober estimate of the outcome of existing tendencies.

### *Machine-made Amusements*

That we cannot play without machines, is already clear. To step on the foot throttle, to crowd through clicking turnstiles, to insert coins in metal slots, to hurl oneself over the surface of the earth or through the air in mechanisms propelled by petrol—these constitute the staple of the modern conception of the good life. And, be it noted, what is desired is not any end external to the functioning of these mechanisms; it is the functioning itself. The fool in a hurry, who drives to his own and everybody else's peril in order that he may 'do' the journey five minutes quicker, has nothing to 'do' with himself when he has 'done' the journey. An extra cocktail in the bar, another imbecile story, a few minutes more of looking through an illustrated paper representing persons of no distinction performing actions of no importance—it is to these pursuits that he devotes the extra few minutes that he has saved at the cost of making himself a public nuisance. To judge by his behaviour, he is a typically modern subscriber to that curiously humble creed, upon which I have already made surprised comment, which holds that any and every place is better than that in which one personally happens to be. Hence he takes steps to remove himself from the place in which he personally happens to be and, the quicker, the better. Our civilization, indeed, is one that will move heaven and earth to save five minutes and not have the faintest idea what to do with them when it has succeeded.

## *He Complains of Civilization*

### *Subordination of Ends to Means*

The key to these aberrations is a pronounced and continuous subordination of ends to means. The young man does not really enjoy the cocktails and the picture papers. What he enjoys is the process of getting to them. He does not really think that any and every place is necessarily superior to the place in which he is, but he thinks that it will be fun going there, wherever 'there' may be. His desire, in other words, is to be in, one might almost say to be part of, a functioning mechanism.

Hitherto, broadly speaking, only boys, mechanics and Americans have been interested in the way things work, while the search for and recognition of value in all its forms, as it manifests itself, for example, in the characters of good men, as it reveals itself to the disinterested pursuers of truth in science and philosophy, and as it receives concrete embodiment in the beauty of pictures and music, has always been the prerogative of adults. Only the mature intelligence, in other words, is capable of appreciating goodness, truth, and beauty; but in our age adults devote themselves to the pursuits of children and, neglecting the manifestation of beauty in great art, flock to see machines being taken to pieces and put together again. They like, in other words, to see how things work.

I went this year (1936) to Olympia to watch people buying radio sets. What knowledge! What technicalities! What expertness! What enthusiasm! So much enthusiasm, indeed, that I was prompted to put a question. 'What', I asked one of the salesmen, 'will these people do with their sets when they get them home?'

He looked at me queerly. It was, I perceived, an exceedingly foolish question.

'They listen in, I suppose,' he said.

Having been made to look foolish, I tried as best I could to cover my tracks. 'Yes,' I said, 'but to what? To what do most of them listen in?'

'Oh, to any old thing,' he said. 'So long as they can get it clear, it doesn't much matter what it is.'

Clearer and more distinct noises from more and more distant places is, it appears, the ambition of the average wireless fan. Foreign languages, vulgar advertisements, meaningless talks, hot jazz—what does it matter so long as they come through clearly, so long, in fact, as the machine functions? Men of genius by the dozen, men of

## *Deus ex Machina*

talent by the hundred, laboured in order that wireless might be. At last they succeeded; the miracle was performed. With what result?—'Ladies and gentlemen, Syd Ambone will now sing "Tripe and Onions".' Ends, as I have already remarked, are subordinated to means.

### *Acknowledgments to Science*

I do not wish it to be thought that I am indifferent to the benefits of applied science. 'A century ago in England children were hanged for theft, and married women could own no property. . . . In the nineteenth century we doubled our average expectation of life, quadrupled our average real wage and vastly improved our education and morals. This was made possible in the masses by the application of science.' Thus complacently, a speaker at the 1935 meeting of the British Association . . . Possibly! Possibly not! The view that science is responsible for the improvement of morals seems to me to be disputable, but to the main lines of the picture nobody—least of all myself—would wish to demur. People live longer and live better; they have more variety and more amusement in their lives; they see more of the world; their work is lighter; they suffer less pain than ever before—all these improvements, I agree, are due in greater or less measure to applied science, and most of them are dependent for their continuance upon the functioning of machines, in the absence of which they would disappear. And they are very great improvements indeed! The diminution of human suffering alone is worth all the rest put together, as anyone with an aching tooth or a stone in the bladder, who gratefully succumbs to the anæsthetic under cover of which the source of his pain is removed, will gladly testify. Physical pain—the truth cannot be too often repeated—is by far the most terrible thing in human life. Immune from it, we all too readily forget the fact, but let us once begin seriously to suffer and we will cheerfully undergo the most abasing mental humiliation, the most disabling financial sacrifice, provided that the suffering be somehow stopped: and it is to applied science that we owe it that nowadays the suffering is so frequently stopped.

But more leisure, less pain, longer life, fewer illusions, better food, better housing, better education, admirable as they are, essential as they may be as means to the good life, do not constitute it. Thus, while gratefully recognizing that the benefits of applied science give



## *He Complains of Civilization*

us an unprecedented mastery over the means to the good life, the good life itself, I insist, they do not give us. I also insist that the whole tendency of our civilization is to mistake the means for the end; that of this tendency the current worship of machines is at once the symbol and the cause, and that, until we learn how to keep them in their place, the fewer machines we can contrive to do with, the better for us. For years reformers have toyed with the idea of limiting the influx of children to the community's capacity for nurturing, educating and employing them, advocating birth control, in fact, in the interests of society. The importance of not letting loose upon the community unwanted babies I do not wish to deny, but greater still at the moment is the importance of not unleashing new marvels of applied science in advance of the community's capacity to absorb them. Hence, I would discourage research in the sciences which exploit the forces of nature, and encourage research into the effects of the impact of such exploitation upon man. Pending the results of such research it is the birth of machines rather than of babies that I would like to control.

I hope that my position is clear, clear enough, at least, to prevent anybody from making the unfounded charge that I am an enemy to science or ignorant of its benefits. My point is a perfectly simple one, so simple that I venture to repeat it. I am asserting simply that the benefits of applied science, valuable as means to the good life, do not constitute it.

### *Escaping from the Machines*

I say that they are valuable as means; but are they indispensable? The answer, apparently obvious to most of my contemporaries, is to my mind far from clear. Some of the so-called benefits of applied science seem to me to be definitely hostile to the good life. All, or almost all, these benefits accrue from man's new-won power to tap the hidden resources of the planet. Cheap cotton, cheap motors, cheap heat, cheap gas, cheap electricity are all the outcome of man's ability to harness the forces of nature to his purpose; they all, in short, testify to his control over nature. Yet the only way in which we can recover from the stench, the filth, the racket, the overcrowding, and the appalling ugliness that the manufacture of cheap cotton, cars, heat, gas, and electricity entails, is by going away into the country, where nature is still in comparative control over man, a

## *Deus ex Machina*

course which the directors and heads of businesses who have the money to remove themselves from the places in which science is being applied to nature invariably take, leaving the serfs whose manual labour provides them with it to toil eight hours a day in the little hells which applied science has made. Meanwhile, the fortunate few who are enabled by the accident of their professions to live away from the centres of population, where humanity is induced by such benefits of applied science as tubes, buses, trains, electric light, gas and a complex drainage system to agglomerate, imitate the example of the captains of industry and repair unanimously to the country, where there are no tubes, no buses, no trains, where there are often no electric light and no drainage but only candles and an earth affair at the bottom of the garden. The English countryside is, indeed, full of writers, painters, persons retired from the professions and the services, and dividend drawers *tout court*, who are living there precisely in order that they may be as far as possible from the places in which science is exhibiting its greatest triumphs and the machine is, in consequence, most completely in control.

Nor are the intellectuals, the artists, the retired colonels and the dividend drawers the only ones in whom the desire to escape makes itself manifest. What of the hundreds of thousands of wage-earners who take every week-end to the roads? Are the roads themselves the objects of their desire? It seems unlikely, for why, if the roads are in fact desired, do their users so unanimously complain of them? Motorists complain of everybody, each other for want of manners, of pedestrians for lunacy, of cyclists for recklessness and for daring to ride abreast, of horses as anachronisms. When they take to the roads at week-ends, they must take their places in a queue in which they will slowly crawl from London to the coast. Whenever they come to a town they must wait for considerable periods, altogether stationary, in a little inferno of ugly sounds and nauseous smells. They are bewildered by signs; harassed by regulations; pestered by officials; and they go continuously in fear of fines. Nevertheless, the number of cars on the roads grows at the rate of two thousand a week. And the cyclists—can it be that they enjoy living permanently in an atmosphere of burnt hydro-carbon; that they appreciate the structures of steel that hurtle past their ears at the rate of two or three a second, or that they relish having to make way for every fool in a car and a hurry? Yet the number of cyclists has doubled in the last

## *He Complains of Civilization*

five years. Where are they all trying to go, these users of machines who would, nevertheless, escape from machines? It is impossible to say. I cannot suppose that all this danger and unpleasantness is endured purely for the sake of spending three hours in a crowd on the shingle at Brighton. For what, then, is it endured? I do not know. I can only suppose that these people are imbued at week-ends by an impulse to escape as inexplicable and irresistible as the migratory impulse which birds feel in spring and autumn but, unlike that of the birds, their impulse does not tell them where to go. It only tells them to go somewhere, anywhere out of the civilization that the machines have made. The fact that it takes them to Brighton only means that as yet they know no better.

### *To be a Farmer's Boy*

And then there are the farmers. 'It is doubtful if the remuneration given by the soil to its cultivators will ever equal in money the returns obtainable in the towns; for just as farming for the larger man is the cheapest way to enjoy the life of a country gentleman, so must the smaller take some of his wages in less tangible form.' The quotation is an extract from a technical article on smallholdings, written by an economist. What interests me is its implied assumption that the mere fact of living in the country confers returns in the shape of intangible values which compensate for the smallness of the economic remuneration. I have been reading a book, *To be a Farmer's Boy*, by that admirable writer, Mr. A. G. Street, in which he speaks of the nostalgia for the country which pervades an increasing number of modern townsmen. 'Let power and wealth go hang,' is the burthen of their letters to him, 'provided only that we may get away from machines and live among country sights and sounds.' Mr. Street tells us of the hundreds of letters that he receives from people who want their sons to be farmers. He points out to them that there is no money in farming, or very little, that it is a life of long hours and great personal responsibility, much mental worry, great risk of financial failure, no holidays by right. But it is no good; farmers the boys must be. Even those who are too old to farm, Mr. Street adds, 'Town friends, most of them far wealthier men than I, bemoan their lot in offices or factory and yearn for the life of the farm.' The inference is obvious: people, it seems, do not mind reasonable poverty, provided only that they may be permitted to enjoy it among natural and not mechanical

## *Deus ex Machina*

objects. I am not surprised. I have myself recently acquired a small house in the country. My nearest neighbour is a farmer, farming a mixed farm of 170 acres. Mainly arable, it contains some pasture, and there are cows and a flock of sheep. These 170 acres are farmed by my neighbour unassisted, except at harvest time, when he gets the roadman, myself, my son and any other odd men who happen to be in the neighbourhood to come and help him. I have never seen a man work harder. He begins at six—sometimes earlier—and he goes on until it is dark; but every day is a different day, and in the course of it he must turn his hand to a hundred different tasks. He never takes a holiday and except for a weekly jaunt into Reading—mainly on business—he practically never leaves his farm. He is, I think without exception, the happiest man I know. Yet he probably makes less money than the average workman in a factory, who works much shorter hours at a much easier job.

### *An Objection*

'But', it will be said, 'a country life is very far from being divorced from machines; it utilizes them at every turn. The food you eat arrives by mechanical transport; the light you read by is mechanically generated; your immunity from disease depends upon a mechanically operated drainage system, and so on. The benefits of science, in fact, are being continuously enjoyed. Even if, as you assert, they do not constitute the good life, they are none the less indispensable to it.'

Again I demur; but before I do so in form, I must make a distinction. So far I have been concerned with facts, facts which it seems to me everybody should recognize, and many do; facts relating to the unconscious revolt from the machine on the part of a civilization that still officially loves and reveres it; facts of which the craze for horse-riding among a population officially committed to car worship, and the enjoyment of the sights and sounds of the farmyard on the part of children whose conventional cry is 'Daddy, come and look at the engines!' are illustrations. But what follows may, for all I know to the contrary, be the expression of a purely personal point of view. I may, that is to say, be leaving the realm of fact and entering that of idiosyncrasy and prejudice.

I have been living these last few weeks in a cottage in a Sussex village. I shall not mention its name for fear, so lovely is it, that my

## *He Complains of Civilization*

readers might be moved to go there, and then it would no longer be a Sussex village. I am very happy here. I write in the morning, play tennis or cricket in the afternoon, bathe in the river, fish in a lake for pike, ride on the downs, shoot an occasional rabbit. . . . Now the question I should like to put to my putative objector is this:—in what way does the specific contribution, which modern civilization has made to the progress of our species—namely, applied science, and its creature, the machine, contribute to my well-being?

### *The Uniformity of the Machine Parasites*

Let us begin with people. Apart from its peace and beauty, my life here is valuable for its social intercourse. Country people are good to know, if only because every country person is different from every other. Different too from dwellers in towns who grow increasingly alike, for the reason that they are increasingly made in the likeness of their masters, the machines. Already most townsmen spend their lives in tending machines, feeding them with coal, giving them to drink with oil and petrol, washing them, rubbing them, polishing them and attending to their toilets. And the machines are hard task masters. If they do not get their meals regularly and receive attendance when they expect it, they turn sulky and refuse to work, or blow up and spread death and destruction all round them. And so it is that in towns masses of human beings are already desperately enslaved to them, and, as they spend their lives increasingly in their company, they take on something of the natures of their masters. For you cannot serve a mechanism for several hours every day, enjoy the amusements that mechanisms provide, eat the food that they produce, read the news that they purvey, see the films in which they figure, without becoming in your own person like unto them, deriving from them something of their soullessness, their regularity, their uniformity. In the great machine states, such as Russia and the United States, the likeness between man and man is appalling. People have the same thoughts, the same scales of values, the same desires, the same leisure-filling occupations, the same amusements. Nor is it only in the new states, in which proletarian or totalitarian unity is deliberately cultivated as a matter of policy, and the ideal of the bee-hive and the termite's nest has come to supersede that of a community of freely thinking, freely willing human beings, owning souls to be saved and harbouring a spark of the divine, that the like-



## *Deus ex Machina*

ness between man and man grows apace. Even in those communities which still retain the traditions of liberalism and give lip-service to the ideal of individuality life is increasingly machine-ridden. There are women in London, many thousands of them who, cut off from all human contacts, spend more than half their waking lives functioning as parts of machines. They keep company not with human beings but with comptometers, tabulators, addressing machines, typewriting machines, counting machines, calculating machines, ledger posters, duplicators and other mechanical devices for speeding up office production. 'Dictaphone girls' sit hour after hour crowned with headphones, while cylinder after cylinder grinds out 'tinned' words into their ears. A girl so employed is nothing but a machine parasite, an extra part which the machine has made outside itself. The tendency of the modern office conditions is to increase the number of these extra machine parts.

The effects upon society are manifest. The tendency of a machine using society is inevitably towards uniformity. The machine tightens the texture of a community making it close, rigid and homogeneous. Public services are centralized, the small shop is ousted by the multiple store, while broadcasting, the Press and the cinema give an unprecedented opportunity to those who control the avenues of publicity to impregnate the modern community with their ideas, and to recommend to it their ideals. Thus, even when they are not imposed by authority, the ideas of the dominant class tend, as never before, to inform the whole community.

Subjected to the continuous pressure of a uniform culture, interpreted for them by rulers, writers, press men, cinema producers, wireless announcers and educators, modern townsmen grow increasingly alike. They eat the same food out of the same tins, read of the same murders and mothers in the same Sunday papers, smack their lips over the same embodiments of female attractiveness on the same screens, brown their backs to the same hue on the same beaches under the same sun, and give to the problems of life the same answers.

Now, I do not desire intercourse with mechanical men, nor do I wish always for the answers I expect. Not only do country people not give them to me, but the answer of any one of them is not the answer of another.

## *He Complains of Civilization*

### *Country People and Things*

Thus human intercourse in the country, besides being more spacious and leisurely, is also more varied and exciting. Not only do you make contact with the whole of a man's mind instead of with an attention preoccupied with half-thoughts of something else, but it is a mind with which it is more worth while to make contact. The conclusion seems to be that human beings do not benefit, in respect of their specific humanity, from intercourse with machines; on the contrary, the degree of their worthwhileness is also the degree to which machines do not touch their lives. Hence, where there are few machines, human intercourse tends to be rich, varied and unexpected; where machines are many, it is thin, monotonous and predictable.

As with people, so with food. My food here is cooked on a coal fire exactly as it would have been cooked three hundred years ago. As anybody who cares about food would agree, such cooking is preferable to cooking by gas or electricity. (In my view, a perfectly 'done' joint cannot be achieved by gas or electricity, and there are important cooking operations—basting, for example, which positively demand a fire, some even a wood fire.) My light in the evening is a lamp. How gratifying to the eyes! How infinitely pleasant to read by! How romantically picturesque in the cottage window! There is, mercifully, no gramophone or radio within reach. There are, God be praised, no valuable deposits in the neighbouring soil, neither coal nor iron, nor gold, nor china clay, and so it is not worth anybody's while to apply science to the task of devastating the loveliest countryside in the world.

### *The Machine Devastates My Food*

Admittedly, my food comes by machinery, but how much better it would be, if it did not! One of the most evil things that the machine has done to the world is to make it practically impossible to enjoy fresh country produce, that is to say, fruit that is freshly gathered, eggs that are freshly laid, vegetables that are newly dug and fish that are newly caught—and by newly caught, I mean newly caught and cooked within two hours, not cooked one day and caught the day before, not even cooked in the evening and caught in the morning.

These good things have always been more or less difficult to obtain in towns, unless one was prepared to pay fantastic prices for them;

## *Deus ex Machina*

but it is only quite recently that our civilization has mastered the art of rendering them practically unobtainable in the places in which they are produced. Every morning I am awakened by the crowing of cocks, yet my eggs come all the way from Denmark. One end of my village is practically surrounded by sties, but Denmark also sends me my bacon. The Downs at my door are picturesquely ranged by flocks of sheep, but my mutton has crossed the seas from New Zealand and been frozen tasteless in the process. Every cottage garden has its currant bushes, most their plum and apple trees; yet my stewed fruit has been taken out of tins, in which it has been carefully packed on the other side of the world. Fresh cream is already practically unobtainable in the country; for although milk is produced in great quantities in the thatched cowshed which I can see from my window, I am not permitted to enjoy the cream.

Instead I am served with a floury substance out of a tin, known as preserved cream. Preserved cream recently afforded me an example of the completest *reductio ad absurdum* of the benefits of scientific civilization which it is ever likely to be my fortune to experience. I was staying at a Somersetshire farmhouse. The usual tinned cream was being served with the usual tinned fruit. I asked the farmer's wife why she did not give her family and her guests the benefits of fresh cream, since there was a herd of 110 head of cattle on the farm. She admitted that she liked fresh cream herself, but her husband was under contract to send all their produce to the preserving factory in Bristol, and it was too much trouble to separate a certain amount off every day and keep it for their own use. 'X's, that's where we send our stuff,' she said. 'Well, I never!' she went on, curiously inspecting the tin she had brought in with her. 'If this very cream that I have got in my hand now isn't X's! I bought it in the stores in Minehead yesterday—I've never had this make before. The fact of the matter is,' she added, 'X's have just started, and only take their stuff from one or two farms, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if this isn't our own cream gone all the way to the factory in Bristol, then to the shop in Minehead, and then back to our farm. What a funny thing!'

A funny thing indeed, but no funnier than the eating by Cornish fishermen of salt fish that has crossed England from Grimsby, while the Grimsby housewife eats Grimsby fish that has been all the way to London and all the way back again, or the news—Autumn 1936—that, while English apples are being left to rot in Kent, imported

## *He Complains of Civilization*

apples 'at ridiculously high prices' are being eaten in Cornwall, because no English apples are obtainable. A truly remarkable feat on the part of a civilization, which has so girdled the planet with its network of communications, which has so speeded up the apparatus of modern transport that England is dowered with the products of all the world, with the result that the Englishman is no longer allowed to enjoy fresh food with its natural taste still strong upon it! Food to-day is so treated, so frozen, so sterilized, pasteurized, hygienized, cleansed, tinned, bottled and canned, that vast quantities of it taste almost exactly the same, with the result that people have come to forget what fresh food is like, and the traditional Englishman of the French comic papers, who complains to the waiter that there is not enough sauce to prevent him from tasting his fish, has become an allegory instead of a joke. Thus, one of the main effects of the machine upon my life in the country has been to make it difficult or impossible for me to get country produce.

### *We Must Have Electricity*

But there are others. Beyond the village is one of the loveliest pieces of country in the south of England. It is a stretch of river meadows, flooded in winter and in summer filled with marsh flowers and alive with birds. Lovely lights play across this green expanse, part meadow, part marsh, and a row of low, wooded hills, topped by an occasional solitary pine, make a perfect frame for its setting. I shall speak of this place again;<sup>1</sup> it is called the 'Wild Brooks'. The knowing ones who live in the place spend their days in the 'Brooks' rather than on the Downs. There is a very good view from the Downs, but there is no detail and no foreground and the walking is all alike. Besides, as I have pointed out before, it is only townsmen who set store by wide views. The 'Brooks' are filled with detail, detail of bush and grass and flower, of bird and beast and insect, and from them there is a superb view of the Downs.

Last year the authorities decided to bring electric light to the village. The villagers protested. They did not want electric light, they said, and in particular they did not want pole-like structures running along the village street. The protest was unavailing; the village, it seemed, must come into the scheme, whether it wanted to or not. The street was spared, but to-day a line of poles joined with trailing wires

<sup>1</sup> See Part V, Chapter XIV, pp. 203, 204.

## *Deus ex Machina*

runs across the edge of the 'Brooks'. It is difficult to imagine a place which they could more completely devastate. The view of the 'Brooks', the loveliest that I know anywhere in the world, is to-day shattered as irretrievably as a pane of glass at which somebody has thrown a stone.

### *And Oil*

A few miles away there is a stretch of open, pastoral country. Here are fields studded with big elms, a copse, a stream, and groves of willows and alders along the sides of the stream. You get a sudden view of the whole scene as you top a rise about a mile to the north of the village, and very peaceful and pleasant it is. Upon this piece of country a few months ago there descended in search of oil the men of mechanism and metal.

The world, we are told, is suffering from over production of oil. In Russia, in Iraq, in Rumania, and in America vast territories are devastated by those who bore for oil into the bowels of the earth, bore so successfully that the world is deluged by a glut of oil, and tortuous arrangements are made to neutralize the disastrous effects of too much oil by maintaining prices at an artificially high level. But though too much for the equilibrium of the capitalist economic system, the flood of oil suffers, it seems, from a serious deficiency; none of it is English oil. Not content with the ugliness of Batum and Baku, the oil seekers have now decided that Sussex of all places in the world is also to be made ugly, and already their work has begun. Sheds go up, rails go down, trucks run to and fro and cranes and derricks take the place of trees. The blight has descended upon my pastoral scene. It is impossible to describe the change that has occurred in this pleasant place. Before were all the beauties of nature; now there is all the *débris* of industrialism. Mercifully, no oil has been discovered, or very little, a circumstance which will, I suppose, be used as an excuse for repeating the devastation elsewhere.

I chanced to see the scene I have described being enacted on the screen. The film was headed 'Examples of Modern Progress'. As the film showed the trees going down and the derricks going up, a perceptible *frisson* of pride ran through the audience. These, they felt, were great times that they were living in; even backward Sussex was experiencing the benefits of modern progress. And what a good thing for employment!



## *He Complains of Civilization*

### *Our Visitors*

One other 'benefit' the village gets from science. Three or four times a day in the summer an invading char-a-banc disgorges its cargo of visitors. They besiege the village shop for picture postcards, take photographs of rustic persons and cottages, sing, play portable gramophones and lounge unhappily about the streets until the char-a-banc comes to take them away again. They make the village noisy, ugly and vulgar, and, so far as I can see, they do not enjoy it in the least. The purchase of picture postcards in villages is the tribute that vulgarity pays to beauty. Personally, I would sooner that beauty went unpaid. In addition to the char-a-bancs, we are increasingly beset with cars. They drive slowly through the village, go down impassable lanes and fuss their way back again, and let loose their bloated contents upon the village green. For a time the air is cleft with shrill, feminine voices:—'My dear, just look at that. Isn't it too sweet?'—while the village is treated as if it were a museum and the inhabitants its exhibits. Thus, most of what we get from science is almost wholly bad. When the char-a-bancs and the motor-cars come, peace departs. For several hours in the middle of a summer's day the place is alive with the throbbing of petrol engines, the honking of horns, and the changing of gears, the atmosphere literally vibrant with the noises of these hateful mechanisms.

Why, then, stay here? Because in the south of England to-day there is literally no place that is safe; there is literally no village where one can be sure of reasonable quiet and immunity from car invasion. If it were not for science, people would be driven to walk in order to enjoy the beauty of the countryside, and those who did not enjoy it would not be here; if it were not for machines, the peace and beauty of this place would not be daily shattered by invasion from the world which the machines have made. This village is one of the few places which the machine has left comparatively intact, and as a result it still retains much of its original beauty. There are here time and space, and because of time and space people are still individual men and women. But even here, it seems, the machines will not let us alone. The village, just because it has been let alone, is still beautiful. It is, therefore, worth visiting. If visitors come in their machines much oftener than they now do, instead of being intermittently shattered, the peace of the place will be gone beyond recall.

Taking my village as a symbol of a way of life, we may say that,

## *Deus ex Machina*

if the machine extends its kingdom much further, nowhere in England will there be left a place in which these good things, time and space and beauty and quiet and solitude and the individual differences between men and women, will survive. The machine will have completely eradicated them.

### *The Vice of Excessive Washing*

There is, however, one feature of my way of life here that I ought, perhaps, in fairness to mention: we have no drains and our water is drawn from a well. This means an earth-closet; it also means that there is no bath. As to the earth-closet, the necessity for its use is, no doubt, a drawback—especially for those whose physiological defects make it a place of constant resort. The lack of baths seems to me to be less serious. I have already expressed my view that the middle-class English have far too many baths. Women in particular, while maintaining an outrageous insensibility to ugly sounds, affect a great niceness in the matter of smells. They are terribly afraid of stinking, and, that they may not do so, they boil themselves pink and are for ever scrubbing and scouring their skins, until they have deprived them of all their natural oils and juices. They then complain of the frequency with which they catch colds. Many people to-day pride themselves on their bathrooms as hunting people pride themselves on their stables and gourmets on their cuisine. For the average American, the bathroom is the centre of the house.

In spite of the testimony of America, I cannot resist the temptation of recording my view that this modern addiction to washing, this craze for cleanliness is, from the point of view of a properly regulated mind, unnecessary; it may even assume the proportions of a vice. At its best, it is a form of wasting time for those whose lives are empty of adequate occupation; a source of minor sensuous gratification to those who are denied by their morals or their unattractiveness primary gratifications. People, after all, managed well enough before this excessive bathing was introduced. People defend themselves for their addiction to the sensual gratification of excessive hot baths on the ground that, if they were not always cleaning themselves, they would become dirty and smelly. Possibly, possibly not. But, if they would only show a little more concern for the assaults they make upon the sense of hearing, I would forgive a much greater degree of offensiveness to the sense of smell; if they would only be a little less

## *He Complains of Civilization*

noisy, I could forgive them for being much more dirty. For my part, I have always found life too full to permit me to spend much time on bathing. Consequently, the deprivation of a modern hot water system is to me comparatively unimportant.

### *The Contradiction in Modern Civilization*

The preceding reflections are, it is obvious, of a highly personal character. Even if people could be found to share my objection to the smell of petrol and the eructations of the explosive engine, and my predilection for country sights and sounds, it is exceedingly doubtful whether my views on the superfluousness of the degree of doubling which the modern world considers necessary would commend themselves. Let them, however, be reassured. I have introduced these paragraphs of purely personal prejudice for a reason. I have drawn for you a picture of a man hating machines—or rather, hating the uses to which machines are put—and pervaded by a nostalgia for the things that machines have destroyed. He is a man who wants, even if he wants them but occasionally, solitude and quiet. He wishes to be able to see country sights and to listen to country sounds. He thinks that there is some reason to suppose that in these matters his case is a sample, not an exceptional one, and that it is becoming increasingly sample. For there are many, he holds, who are finding the mechanical pleasures offered by modern civilization increasingly unsatisfying and are coming to see that machines, useful as they may be as a means to the good life, cannot themselves confer it. He notices, for example, that in spite of the increased number of appliances for rendering modern music, and the growing excellence with which it is rendered, the demand for pianos is beating all previous records. People, it seems, prefer to play simple music for themselves, however badly, to listening to complex music perfectly rendered by mechanisms. He notices too how riding grows apace, and that comfortable motorists are willing to be turned into terrified equestrians. There is, then, if he is right, a contradiction in modern society, the sort of contradiction that is most clearly exemplified in the boy who is just coming to his middle teens. On the one hand, there is the still continuing interest of his boyhood, the interest in machines. He likes to take them to pieces, to see how they work, to put them together again. What can they do? What are their powers? How fast, in fact, can the 'old bus' be made to go? These are still the youth's official

## *Deus ex Machina*

interests, and, in witness of them, his den is filled with mechanical gadgets and littered with journals which describe their manufacture and management.

But already, though he is scarcely conscious of them, new interests are asserting themselves. He is suddenly caught by a gleam of sunlight over a winter landscape, moved by a piece of poetry, transported by some bars of music which he casually overhears as he passes an open window, rising simply and sweetly into the night; or he is swept by the excitement of ideas. Soon he will fall in love. Unlike the old interests, the new owe nothing to machinery.

It is not otherwise with our own age. For four generations the men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have gone a-whoring after mechanisms; to-day they begin to feel an unavowed dissatisfaction with their metal loves. Those of us who are lucky enough to have the time and the leisure to pursue the good life wherever we can find it, testing the real pleasures which last against the momentary thrills that fade, have already, for the most part, discarded them and chosen to live lives which, as I have tried to show, are to a diminishing degree dependent upon machines. We will use them when we may as conveniences, but we would rather be without the convenience than bow down and worship what we use.

### *Relevance of Diatribe on Washing*

To these generalizations there is one exception and, so far as I can see, one only. Most of us, especially those of us who are known as 'the ladies', must have abundant and readily accessible hot baths, and nearly all of us require water to carry away the refuse contents of our bowels. Comparatively immune from these needs myself, I am prepared to write off my immunity as a personal idiosyncrasy. My family lived for generations in country cottages, for generations they lacked baths; for generations they sat upon closets of earth. My comparative indifference to the allurements of the former, my refusal to be incommoded by the discomforts of the latter, are, I am prepared to grant, explicable on Freudian lines as a regression to the primitive, even a nostalgic desire for the womb. But these regressive peculiarities of mine are not, after all, essential to the argument. For consider its course. First, I find that I can live very happily without the aid of machines; secondly, I am, I believe, not exceptional but sample in this respect. If I am right in this belief, my

## *He Complains of Civilization*

preference for a country life, with its non-dependence upon machines as opposed to the life of the cities, whose dependence is continuous and absolute, is a fact of some sociological importance. It points to a *malaise* which may be at the root of some of the familiar troubles of our civilization. Thirdly, I am bound to recognize that in one respect I am not sample, nor is any possible extension among my contemporaries of the present unconscious revolt against mechanisms likely to make me so. The question is, then, whether this admitted idiosyncrasy of mine is destructive of the sociological significance claimed for the argument as a whole. I submit that it is not. For does anybody wish to maintain that the laying down by the Rural District Council of a water main, and the plumbing operations necessary to tap this main in such a way as to provide water in bath and lavatory, must needs bring in their train the features which we have come to recognize as belonging distinctively to a mechanical civilization; must, for example, make me dependent upon machines for the supply of my daily thoughts, resort to machines for my amusements, worship machines for my religion? I take it that nobody does. The early Victorians, after all, had baths and water-closets, but they did not go a-whoring after pieces of synthetic metal, make to themselves graven images of dynamo and explosive engine, or identify the rapid motion of pieces of matter across the surface of the earth with the end of man.

In fact, I have gone out of my way to stress the function of machines in providing hot baths and flush water-closets, because it seems to me to afford a good illustration of the way in which in a sane society science may be most fruitfully applied to the uses of man. Providing hot water, disposing of excrement, the machines are performing a valuable, if you like, a necessary, function. But it is a background function. They are like scene shifters clearing the stage for the living of the good life, not actors playing a part in it. Nobody, after all, wants to set up a temple of worship to an adequate plumbing system. No child of mine, no child of anybody else with whom I am acquainted outside the American continent, insists upon visitors inspecting the wonders of the bathroom. It may be—alas, it too often is—'Daddy, come and look at the engines', but it is not 'Daddy, come and look at the lavatory'.



## *Deus ex Machina*

### *The Machines Retaliate*

To the foregoing indictment there is a postscript. Upon its inclusion, common fairness insists, for it may be held by many to provide an explanation of the obviously ill-tempered bias which has pervaded this chapter, an explanation which, by revealing the origin of the bias, will appear to many satisfactorily to dispose of the contentions it prompts. I have been making a not undignified protest against the modern perversion of values symbolized by the worship of machines. I have tried to show that this protest is based on reason, when it may be merely the outcome of pique. For it may be that I am merely paying the machines back.

I do not, it is obvious, like machines, and the machines are only too well aware of the fact. Sensitive to the least breath of disapproval, these spoilt children of our civilization are only too ready to take offence. They do take offence. In multitudinous ways they conspire to discomfort and humiliate me. At my approach, engines turn sulky and refuse to work, radio sets are silent, carburettors become blocked, dynamos cease to turn, watches to keep time. My effect upon machines is, indeed, almost invariably disastrous. Cars of the most magnificent pretensions, which have never known the inside of an alien garage, falter and fail when I enter them.

Now it may well be the case that the foregoing reflections are neither more nor less than a rationalization of my resentment at the discomfort and humiliation which machines have inflicted upon me. I cannot, I find, get on with machines. When I was a boy, my steam engines spat and boiled over. My absurdly non-prehensile fingers failed to turn screws, to undo parcels or to cope with the simplest gadgets. I could not even knock in nails. I cannot, I repeat, get on with machines. Very well then, I take it out of them by insisting that they are not worth 'getting on with'. Common fairness, I say, insists that I should make this confession, because of the valuable data it affords as to my state of mind. It is possible that it may afford an explanation of my heresy. The reader must judge for himself.

## THE SNARE OF THE COUNTRY AND THE CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR

---

### *A Warning*

I have just read the foregoing, and I am appalled to find that I have unintentionally drifted into a eulogy of country life; appalled to think that I should have been moved to embroider so hackneyed a theme—for what new thing can anybody find to say about the country?—appalled lest somebody might be so worked upon by my praises as to be actually induced to go and live in the country. This would be disastrous; disastrous at least for ninety-nine of us out of a hundred. I am, therefore, taking it upon myself to warn those of my readers, who may be rash enough to contemplate such a step, of the folly of their undertaking. There are two warnings in particular that I should like to give. First, there is no good purpose to be served by going to live in the country, unless one is prepared to live a country life. A country life involves interest, and, if possible, participation in country pursuits such as farming, digging, gardening, herb-wine and cider-making, and in country pleasures, such as fishing, shooting, rabbiting and, conceivably, hunting. It is not enough just to go and live in the country. Living in the country is something that must be learnt, and, for the townsman, the learning involves graduation through a number of disciplines, and willingness to put up with a considerable amount of initial boredom.

### *A Typical London Couple Take to the Country*

Not very far from where I live is a large thatched house, the property of an eminent barrister. The house used to be three cottages holding three families. The barrister bought them, turned them into one, had them 'done up' and proceeded to install himself, his wife, his children and their maids and nurses. At least, he installed his children, their maids and their nurses, for he and his wife, though they inhabit the thatched house in theory, are in practice nomads. They come for week-ends; in the summer they come for occasional

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

weeks, but they never take up prolonged residence; they are never permanently *there*, with the result that, when they do happen to be there, they give the impression of camping rather than of living in their thatched house. This has been their mode of life for years and they seriously believe that it is a mode of *country* life. In fact, however, they know nothing of the country. They are ignorant of farming, and take no interest in it; they engage in no country pursuit; they subscribe to the village cricket and football clubs, but they take no part in the life of the village. Socially, they do not recognize the village's existence. For various offices they employ quite a number of people living in the village, but they do not know them except as employees, nor do they know the other 'gentry' who are their neighbours. They do not gossip in the local pub, and, though they admire the views and take frequent excursions in their car, they do not walk in the surrounding country. Their roots and their interests are in London; from London come their friends at week-ends; from London their drinks and from London their food. They spend their time playing tennis and playing bridge, motoring, drinking, cocktailing and lying about in bathing dresses in the garden altering the colour of their skins. Of these occupations most, with the possible exception of the last, could be carried on just as well—perhaps better—in London. In fact, they are not living in the country at all; they are doing, rather inconveniently, in the country some of the things that people do very much better in the towns.

Now, all over the southern counties to-day there are people living this kind of life. In their red-tiled, eight-roomed houses, little family groups pursue the meaningless round of their isolated existences. The group is entirely detached from the community to which it should belong; it knows no spiritual centre in a church, no secular centre in meeting or assembly; it has no roots in the land; it takes no part in local government. It is interested only in itself. It has no concern for the climate or the soil; it hardly notices the change of seasons, except in so far as they entail a change of game. For if the trees go into leaf, the flowers blossom, the birds make nests, the hay is cut and the corn gathered, the mists come and the fruit, the smoke of bonfires rises and the golden glory of autumn is diffused about the land, in vain. Its members do not see these things and, except that they eat the nuts and the fruit, they are not affected by them. What, then, are they doing? They are making contact with other family

## *He Complains of Civilization*

groups living in similar red-tiled, eight-roomed houses, in order that with their assistance they may play tennis, golf and bridge, and discuss yet other family groups living in yet other red-tiled, eight-roomed houses.

In the mere week-ender such habits would be pardonable—you would not expect him to know any better—but these people live all the year round in the country, yet live in blinkers. And they cannot, I affirm, be reckoned country people at all; they are just townsmen camping—it may be permanently camping—in the country.

### *Frantic, but Unsuccessful Return to the Town*

Considered as a substitute for the highly mechanized life of modern civilization, considered as an escape from the machine, this sort of thing is worse than useless. For it makes the worst of both worlds. It takes away the interests and pleasures of the town without putting in their place the interests and pleasures of the country. These camping townees have deliberately turned their backs upon the goods that the towns have to offer—people and laughter, games and dances, music and the movies and an acquaintance so varied that someone can be found to suit every mood. Living in the country one no longer enjoys these delights, or one enjoys them with second-rate people in a second-rate way. One dances rarely, badly, and to the music of inferior bands; one sees pictures which are out of date; one plays social tennis on inferior courts; and one must put up with what few people the country has to offer for one's acquaintance, whether one likes them or not. And when one finds these makeshifts unsatisfying—and the people of whom I am thinking are continuously finding them unsatisfying—one gets into one's car and dashes panic-stricken to the town, where one drifts mournfully about the scenes of alleged gaiety in which one can no longer satisfyingly participate. How well one knows them, those country and colonial cousins, making feverish endeavours to get back into the swim, yet finding themselves mere spectators on the bank; ceremoniously attending the dinners and dances at which they talk to nobody but themselves; earnestly going to the wrong *matinées*; lunching miserably with bored friends at unfashionable cafés. These are people who are never at rest. Their lives are spent perpetually in transit from town to country, from country to town, as if they were trying to escape from something which is lying in wait for them in whichever

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

place they happen to be. And so they are—the something being the boredom which comes to those who, having inherited none of the traditions of the country life, and lacking the humility or the adaptability to acquire what they have failed to inherit, dump themselves and their belongings on to the unprotesting counties of England and, surprisingly, expect peace, serenity and dignity to be added unto them.

Now their boredom, reader, and their unrest will be yours, if you are so foolish as to be misled by the denunciations and commendations of the preceding chapter into thinking that the country would suit you. Many times have I seen middle-aged couples, possessed of an economic sufficiency, leave the town and project themselves and their belongings upon the country. The men have been sometimes happy; the women have never been other than bored or restless. The fact should not occasion surprise; it is hard for a modern townsman to come to terms easily and happily with the country; it is hard for the product of a mechanical civilization to live a life which is independent of machines; it is hard for those who have been used to the standardized amusements enjoyed by crowds to derive pleasure in solitude from what nobody, unless perhaps God in the beginning, ever intended to *amuse* anybody—the smell of an autumn evening, the feel of the soil beneath one's bare feet, the turning of the hay. . . . The enjoyment of the instinctive satisfactions which attend the followers of the traditional country life is, for those who take to it late in life, difficult of attainment; men sometimes attain it; women, in my experience, practically never.

### *Author's Qualifications for the Art of Country Living*

For there is so much that must be given up. Take, for example, my own case. For me, to escape into the country, and to tolerate it when I have got there, is easier than it is for most. I have a quite peculiar dislike of machines, which, as I have already mentioned, know only too well what I think about them, and behave badly to me. I hate the noise and ugliness of London and am bored by most of the amusements that the machines provide. On the positive side I have much to help me. My people have been tenant farmers and labourers for centuries, and my own father was brought up on the land. My feeling for the country is, therefore, ancestral and instinctive. If I stay in the town for more than a few weeks at a time, the desire for the country,



## *He Complains of Civilization*

for its sights and sounds and smells, grows into an obsession; and, as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> it is the humdrum everyday kind of country—that is to say, the country that is meant to be lived in—that I want. I yield to nobody in my admiration for Nature magnificent. I am exalted by cliff scenery, seascapes and wide-spreading views; mountains, at any rate the English mountains, I love in all their moods; I have had great days on moors and I have even grown to like the marsh country and the fens. But my craving for the country owes little to my admiration of the picturesque. Scarcely at all is it a desire for the beautiful. When I am in London and feel a nostalgia for the country, it is the muddled, indeterminate, unsensational countryside of the south of England that I picture to myself. I want woods and coppices with streams flowing through them, little tracts of heath and little hills, a landscape so small and broken that every quarter of a mile yields a fresh view, and, above all, fields. Water meadows and plough land; land under corn; land under root crops; even land under cabbages—all these are pleasant to me. When I am by the sea, however magnificent the coast, I habitually outrage my friends by trying to walk inland, turning my back upon the scenery of the cliffs in order that I may gaze upon the cabbages of the dull hinterland of Cornwall.

Now this country to which I am instinctively drawn is, it is obvious, the kind of country in which a man can live. It is a workaday rather than a holiday country, a place in which people make their living, rather than a place in which they take their pleasure. Not only do I care to live in country which is humdrum rather than picturesque, I like to live there in a humdrum way. I am happier, as I have told, in farmhouse or cottage than in boarding-house or guest-house. Big hotels I loathe anyway, but more especially do I loathe them in the country. They are alien excrescences set upon the face of the land, owing nothing to it, deriving nothing from it, but like a cancer sucking its people and its energies into themselves. The hotel saps the independence of the country people whom it takes into its service, making them both predatory and dependent, both grasping and servile, and turning them to purposes not their own. If, being in the country, I must stay in a place frequented by townsmen, I would sooner it were a Youth Hostel or even a holiday camp than the most luxurious of hotels. In fact, Youth Hostels seem to me to be from

<sup>1</sup> See Part I, Chapter IV, p. 42.

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

almost every point of view wholly admirable, although I have regretfully to confess that they are not always adapted to the limitations of a soft and fattening middle-aged gentleman. But, as I say, it is above all in the farmhouse or the country cottage that I wish to stay, and by 'country cottage', I do not mean a residence that has been modernized, complete with hot water system, dormer windows, oak fumed beams and low, hygienic bed, but a cottage of the sort in which my ancestors lived—dark and stuffy, over furnished and inconvenient, with antimacassars on every chair, mats on every table, pictures by Marcus Stone on the wall, grocers' or church almanacs on the dresser, mantelpieces covered with ornaments and encrusted with china, lamps that must be cleaned, filled and trimmed, and a well at the bottom of the garden from which all the water must be fetched.

Liking these things, I have, it is obvious, considerable qualifications for living in the country. In the country I find life easy and care-free; but who does not know that calling up of the faculties, that summoning of the energies, that invading consciousness that life is a difficult and serious business, a continuous challenge to one's wits and tax upon one's powers, which assails the returning Londoner as his train steams into its terminus? In the country, unless one is a complete fool one can contrive to live to one's own and everyone else's satisfaction without undue taking of precautions or expenditure of energy; but life in London is a struggle in which those who wish to avoid disaster must keep themselves perpetually on the alert, their faculties tuned perpetually up to concert pitch.

## *Urban Tastes of Author*

Yet, with so much in my favour, I confess that I cannot live in the country. For to do so, means, I find, that I must give up too much. A social and gregarious organism, I like the company of my fellows, and I like it mixed. I like to hear about affairs from politicians, science from scientists, ideals and ideas from students, gossip from friends, shop from colleagues and personalities from women. I like to rub my brains against those of my fellows in argument and discussion. I like—the confession must be made, and I hope it will not turn the reader against me—to instruct and to influence the young. I am sufficiently a journalist to want to know all the current news and what the world is saying about the news; sufficiently a preacher to want to use it as a text for the edification of my fellows in lectures,

## *He Complains of Civilization*

speeches, and articles; sufficiently an idealist to want to make it serve, by warning or example, the interests and causes in which I believe. In order that I may do all these things, I must be constantly listening and as constantly talking. I need, in fact, a circle and an 'audience'. Not only do I need these things, but I enjoy them; enjoy them so much, that the gossip of the common room and the coffee house has become the breath of my intellectual being. Particularly do I like to attend the luncheon of a club or a journal, when a group of men of similar outlook but different attainments bring their varied knowledge and experience to a common bar for judgment, valuation and instruction. I like the jests, the chaff, the esoteric allusions, the jolly atmosphere of men meeting and talking together, before subsiding into the grave discussion of contemporary affairs.

All these things, the lecture, the class, the club, the circle, the audience, the meals with my fellows, the chatter of my kind, I must give up, if I go to live in the country. Nor is this all. Living in London, one makes a host of acquaintances—I will not use the word 'friends', for, even if a man meets in London those who are to be his friends, their friendship can only be cultivated in the country—and the host of acquaintances always includes a few whose acquaintance-ship one wants to pursue—men whose minds interest one, women to whom one would like to make love. In London one may acquire a manner; it may even develop into a reputation. The possession of a reputation saves much social trouble and enables the celebrated to skip the ABC of personal relationships. Moreover, people seek out the celebrity, who no longer has to do all the spadework of social intercourse himself. Where so much human material offers itself, discrimination is thereby facilitated. . . . In short, in a town there are available all the pleasures of society. There are also art, the theatre, the cinema and music. Of these I should badly miss only music, and, though I am quite prepared to believe that the degree of technical competence now reached by wireless and gramophone would go far to supply my need, I like to talk about the music to which I have just listened.

### *Intellectual Needs and Virtues of Author*

Now taken separately and singly no one of all these attractions is as important as my feeling for the country, yet cumulatively they outweigh it. My soul—if I may flatter myself with the possession of

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

such a thing—would atrophy, my mind would be starved, if I cut myself adrift from my fellows, and because my mind was starved, I should become a man of moods, exacting, quarrelsome and eccentric.

I am one of those who in a quite special degree are dependent for their intellectual activity upon constant intellectual stimulus. I cannot generate and exteriorize ideas from my own being; I cannot spin thought from the vitals of my own consciousness; to put it bluntly, I am not inspired. Nevertheless, my natural sphere is the world of ideas. Deficient in imaginative sensibility, unable to divine in a given situation what people are feeling, and as a consequence psychologically obtuse to the point of insensitiveness—I can quite cheerfully enter a room full of people who regard me with the greatest dislike and be blissfully oblivious of the atmosphere which their united animosities are presumably generating—I have none the less a considerable power of intellectual sympathy. I can understand what people are thinking, when I cannot sense what they are feeling. I can also divine what they are not thinking when they ought to be; ought to be, but are not, because of something which they have found difficult to understand, and, what is more important, I can see the reason for their difficulty and help to remove it. Thus, I am by nature a teacher, or expositor of ideas. I can expound other people's ideas more clearly, persuasively and intelligibly than they could expound them themselves. I can do this even when I disagree profoundly with the ideas I am expounding, which means that I have the virtue of intellectual detachment, and I can see the force of the arguments in favour of beliefs which I do not hold, thus providing myself and others with evidence of open-minded impartiality.

For example, though I am temperamentally unable to appreciate poetry, I can lucidly set forth poets' meanings, indicating the differences of method, aim and appeal between one sort of poetry and another, and enumerating the distinctive characteristics of the hold which poetry has on the imagination. I recently gave—somewhat, I admit, to my own astonishment—a quite sympathetic *exposé* of the ideals of Fascism. In the world of ideas, in short, I feel at home; I take to them so readily, I am so quickly and so easily their master that I can be at play with them. Now the play of ideas is the source of wit, and from wit I derive intense pleasure, though little from humour. Finally, after much clarifying, arranging, grouping, expanding, con-



## *He Complains of Civilization*

tracting and generally manipulating the ideas of other people, I occasionally manage to add a small contribution of my own. You cannot move continuously among the creations of other minds without being sometimes moved to create on your own account. Even if what comes out is only an individualized version of what went in, or, to put it less politely, even if it is only the intellectual excrement which is left over after the good, sound nourishment of the ideas of the world's great thinkers has been chewed, digested and assimilated into the system, nevertheless, what comes out *is* one's own. It is stamped ineffaceably with the seal of one's own consciousness; its shape, its texture, its flavour, all these, I think, are contributed by oneself.

### *Author's Claim to Originality*

Actually, however, I am inclined to rate the products of my mind higher than excrement.

I recently saw a chemical demonstration in which the lecturer dipped a string into a glass containing a solution of, I think, some kind of chloride. As the string descended into the glass, little crystals began to form along its length; presently it became almost invisible behind the coat of crystals which it had, as it were, provoked. The word which the chemist used to describe this process was 'precipitation'. The insertion of the string causes stuff which is latent and, it may be, invisible in the solution to precipitate itself along the string in the form of crystals. The metaphor describes with some degree of exactness the character of those of my own intellectual processes, for which I wish to claim originality. The new thought which somebody more original than I has conceived and introduced into my mind is like the piece of string. It is not merely that by virtue of the process of introduction it is insensibly changed, so that what I, in fact, conceive is the nearest thing to the original idea of which my mind is capable, although this no doubt is the case. More important—at least, I hope it is more important—is the fact that the new idea attracts to itself and becomes encrusted with an intellectual content of elements that have been supplied by me, elements of whose existence I should, in the absence of the precipitating agent, have remained unconscious.

It seems to me probable that most so-called original thinking is of this type. Some stimulus from outside is required to set the thinker.



## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

off. The stimulus usually takes the form of a novel idea. The stimulus applied, the mind duly begins to function; but the functioning, although it originates with the stimulus, which may further determine its form, as the alignment of the group of crystals is determined by the string, goes out beyond it, rising, it may be, in the end to levels which lie above the reach of the original idea whose stimulation initiated the process. It is as if a man were to tap a hole in a water tank; the direction and volume of the resultant outpouring are determined by the shape, position and size of the hole, but the area which the flooding covers and the limits to which it spreads depend upon the initial pressure of water in the tank.

## *Minds Exceptional and Minds Simple*

Now I have not indulged in this disquisition upon my modes of thinking solely for the pleasure of intellectual confession. It is, no doubt, pleasant to try to tell the world how one's mind works; but I do not flatter myself that the record affords matter of wide public interest, unless one's mind is either very exceptional or significantly sample. If a mind is exceptional, it is interesting to know about it, just as it is interesting to know about any other wonder of nature. It is intriguing, for example, to conceive of it as a signpost pointing to a level of consciousness which all human beings may one day reach, and to regard the activities of the exceptional mind as an advance indication of the possibilities latent in minds *tout court*. Thus one listens with interest to records of the prodigies performed by the mind of Pascal, of the feats of reasoning of Henri Poincaré, as well as of the circumstances in which great men have been seized of their most fruitful inspirations. Personally, I have always been far more interested in the differences between people's minds than in the differences between their characters. It is when it is functioning at its highest level that the human spirit is the most intriguing; it is at this level that it also exhibits the greatest degree of difference from other human spirits functioning at the same level. Consumed by lust or ravening for a beef steak, I doubt whether my own consciousness exhibits many points of difference from that of the savage; reflecting on philosophy or listening to Mozart, it is different not only from that of the savage, but from that of other individuals at my level of development engaged in the same activities.

Most people's characters seem to me to conform to well-known

## *He Complains of Civilization*

types. The good man is pleasant to be with and invaluable in an emergency, but he is not interesting to write about. He is so like other good men. As for the emotions which males and females experience prior to the success of males in inducing females to enter with them the same beds, and the steps taken to achieve this consummation, they seem to me to follow an all too familiar formula, and I am totally unable to conceive why this single strand in the rope of human emotion should occupy such a totally disproportionate share of importance in the literature and art of our time—and, the lower the art, the greater the share. I have reflected anxiously upon the causes of this bewilderment of mine. Is it that, being middle-aged, I am drying up? Or, more creditably, that I am becoming adult, while most of my contemporaries are still children? Or is it that, as the psycholo-analysts affirm, the English are sex starved—while I am not—and enjoy vicariously in art, literature and the 'movies' the pleasures they miss in life? I do not know, and I have ceased very much to care, for—to return from my digression—what interests me is, I repeat, not characters, emotions, dispositions or temperaments, but minds.

### *Endearing Modesty of H. G. Wells*

I have recently read Wells's autobiography. I claim to have derived more enjoyment from it than from any other of his works—the claim is hard to sustain because I have enjoyed almost all of them prodigiously—because it records the development and illuminates the mode of working of one of the most remarkable minds of our time. Characteristically, Wells tells us that the interest of his autobiography lies in the fact that his mind is a sample one, unusual only in its expressiveness. This, of course, is nonsense, deserving to be classed as a merely conventional concession to Wells's often expressed conviction that individuality is neither important nor permanent, that it will presently be transcended, and that the most forward-looking minds of the age have already reached a level at which they have passed beyond an interest in individuals as such. Individuals are, I gather, in Wells's view no longer to be treated as ends in themselves, but as means to some end, beyond themselves—that is to say, to the engendering of collective Man, whoever or whatever he or it may be. Now it is prejudicial to the plausibility of this belief, not less than to the consistency of its author, that he should

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

embark upon the study of an individual person running to some eight hundred odd pages, and so Wells tries to fob the reader off with the ridiculous view that the interest of the book is bound up with and dependent upon the extent to which it is the record of a sample and therefore, presumably, typical brain, and not of the highly individualized brain of a man of genius I do Wells the justice of supposing that he is not making fun of us; that he is not indulging in mock modesty; that he really means what he says, and that, when he began to feel the need to indulge himself by talking about himself, it was merely his victimization by his own theories which required him to justify the indulgence by pretending that he was not H. G. Wells, but the typical common man.

But, though the claim to typicality coming from Wells is too obviously ridiculous to call for serious examination, the implications of the claim are such as I am prepared to admit, in so far as they suggest that minds are interesting not only in the degree to which they are individual, but also in the degree to which they are sample. Accordingly, I have ventured on the foregoing description of my own mental processes and of the circumstances and occasions that chiefly set them going, not solely because they are mine, and because I know more about them, therefore, than anybody else can hope to do, but because I believe that, with minor modifications, they are those of most of my contemporaries and, what is more, of most intellectual, scientific, literary and artistic workers in all times and places.

## *Conditions for the Production of Good Work*

In art, in literature and in science, the work not only of the little man but of the big man has, I think, with rare exceptions, been, at least in part, the work of a school. When many are gathered together in the pursuit of professional and technical interests; when there is constant interchange of ideas, discussion of plans, reports of progress, criticisms of results; when, in a word, everybody is competing and trying to excel in the same sphere, and when as a result many are doing good work, then there is always a chance that one or two will be doing great work. Admittedly the recipe for the production of great work is not known, but the records of the past show, I think, with remarkable unanimity how frequently the work of great men appears as a culmination of the tendencies and characteristics of a

## *He Complains of Civilization*

school, which it nevertheless transcends. It was so in the case of Bach and Haydn; it was so in that of Leonardo and Cézanne; it was so in that of Dryden and Pope. The scientist, even more than the artist, is in debt to his contemporaries, for science, even more than art, is a co-operative achievement. It proceeds by the communication of experiments, by the accumulation of results, by the interchange of ideas, by reflection upon the suggestiveness of the work of others. This being so, it would seem to follow that the creative worker who goes too often into the wilderness is ill-advised. In the absence of friends to check and, if necessary, to deride, his inspiration becomes lush; in the absence of wit to polish and criticism to prune, his productions grow over-ripe. He omits to anchor fantasy in fact, or to bring the creatures of his swelling imagination to the bar of common sense. As his loneliness grows upon him, he comes to inhabit a private world which has lost any bridge of communication with the public world of common men. How well we know them, those products of the artistic wilderness, in which originality has become eccentricity, and individuality has burgeoned into fad. Even at their best, there is something excessive about the works of these lonely artists. Blake and Beethoven are, no doubt, very great men, but who shall say that their work would not have been better even than it is, if it had been just a little more commonplace; if it had smacked more of the market place and less of the mountain tops, and been mixed with the homely, everyday spirit of common men.

### *Effects of Rustication on Myself and Others*

If there is any substance in this line of thought, my case is in no sense an exceptional one. To others whose work lies in the realm of ideas, no less than to myself, close contact with the world of men is essential. We need material to bite on; provocations to react to; suggestions to incorporate; criticisms to digest; above all, we need the constant stimulus of intercourse with like minds having like interests. The soul of man, like every living organism, must, if it is to become fruitful, be crossed with what is other than itself; the more numerous and the more different the organisms with which it is crossed, provided always that they be of the same species, the more fruitful will be the result. Left to itself, the soul grows poor and thin from lack of nourishment, and rattles like a withered pea in its pod; or, rank from self-feeding, it loses itself in the jungle of its own



## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

fancies. Like all good things, mental excellence is a mean between two defects. If it is to achieve this mean and to hold it, the mind must be shored up, as it were, on both sides. It must be both stimulated by the constant infusion of new material and pruned by the no less constant application of intelligent criticism. Removed from the market place, it inevitably inclines in one direction or the other, developing defects either of dryness or rankness. Whether it becomes too dry or too rank will depend upon its original nature. Mine becomes too dry. If I live for any space of time in the country, I presently find myself without a thought with which to bless myself, and my mind, which is a reasonably powerful instrument, turns round and round upon itself with nothing to bite on, like the grinding of a cornless mill.

I have, I hope, by this time explained why—for all that I have had to say in praise of the country and of life in the country—I cannot live there; not at least, as yet. I have also tried to explain why I think my case to be a sample one, and why nobody who is engaged in intellectual work, whether creative or critical, will be any better advised to retire to a country life than I should be. Nor is it difficult to point the moral with examples, for the effects of ignoring my advice are multiple and manifest. The southern counties are dotted with the residences of intellectuals producing great works in country cottages. These people are neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring; no longer of the town, they are yet not of the country. Having chosen the life of the country they are qualified by training, taste, education and need, only for that of the town.

### *Fundamental Contradiction in the Country Life*

The foregoing has been primarily devoted to the case of the creative workers in science and art and literature, and of the publicists and critics, who, together with the creative workers, constitute what is called the intelligentsia, and I have ventured to represent my own case as being of interest because it typifies theirs. But if I am a sample of the intelligentsia, they may be taken as a sample of a much larger class—the whole class of those who, nurtured in the environment of modern civilization, an environment dependent upon and conditioned by man's control over nature, are driven by their dislike of the mechanical to seek some form of escape or retreat into the country, where nature has still some measure of control over man.



## *He Complains of Civilization*

To escape, to retreat seems plausible enough. What man that still retains the power of independent judgment would not wish to escape from the dominance of the machine? Yet the ideal of the country life is for the townsman, whether highbrow or low, vitiated by an inherent contradiction, a contradiction which besets him, not from without, but within. Upon this issue between town and country the men of our civilization are divided against themselves. The need for the amenities of a civilized, urban existence, however artificial its origin, has grown to be second nature, and will not be exorcized. As W. H. Hudson puts it: 'We are not in Nature; we are out of her, having made our own conditions, and our conditions have reacted upon us, and made us what we are—artificial creatures. Nature is now something pretty to go and look at occasionally, but not too often or for too long a time.'

I have tried to show that this need is something more than a mere craving for lights and laughter. It is not merely the amenities of the town, the cinema and the play, the concert and the ballroom, the cocktail parties and the dinner parties, which in the country we miss. These pleasures are real enough, but the taste for them can be satisfied—at least partially—by an occasional visit. More important is the need to participate in the activities which have made our natures what they are, to enjoy the experiences that are literally of the stuff of our being.

Hence, to deprive ourselves of these activities, to renounce these experiences, is to deny our natures and to mutilate our being. If we deprive ourselves of the nourishment which our natures demand, our lives become thin and poor; we suffer from a feeling of frustration, from a sense of unused activities, of talents running to waste. To live in the country is to deny ourselves a fair chance, the chance to realize all that we have it in us to be. Life, in pursuance of its own instinctive purpose, has contrived to evolve us as reasonable beings. 'Wherein', asked Aristotle, 'does man differ from all other created things?' And answered: 'in his possession of reason'. Life, then, we may suppose, intends us to function primarily upon the plane of that activity which we alone possess. We are, in spite of all the apparent evidence to the contrary, we are *par excellence* reason-exercising beings.

### *The Opposition of Incompatible Pulls*

Hence a longing for a purely rustic existence must be regarded as

## *Snare of the Country and Character of the Author*

regressive, until such time as we can obtain in the country the satisfaction of our moral, intellectual and æsthetic needs that is available in the town. To retire to the country is to turn our backs upon such civilization as our species has managed to achieve. Thus every element in my nature save one demands that I stay and function to the best of my ability in London. On one side are ranked politics and philosophy, the drama, music and the cinema, the variety of intellectual intercourse, the moulding of young men's minds in their most receptive stage, the society of loved friends; on the other, there is this simple and single longing to escape from the civilization of machines, and to live closer to nature. It is one against many. My trouble is that with each year I live the one grows stronger. Year by year the pleasure I derive from the indulgence of the longing for the country is keener, the return to London harder, a spring day in London more intolerable. Presently, perhaps, this single need of my nature will grow to outweigh all the opposed considerations put together.

It is said that as we grow older our natures integrate, and the oppositions between their various discordant elements become reconciled. I have not found it so. In my case the opposition I have described grows yearly more acute, until its solution has become the dominating problem of my life. And, I insist, it is not an exceptional problem; the dichotomy is in most of us; I am exceptional only in being more conscious of it, in being, as Wells would say, 'more expressive'.

I have, I observe, been an unconscionably long time in giving my first warning to those who, misled perhaps by the doctrines of the last chapter, would betake themselves to the country. My excuse is that the warning is based upon a certain view of human nature, or rather of modern human nature, and to give it a sufficient impressiveness, this view had to be unfolded. I have had, that is to say, to mount my vitalist hobby horse, and to evoke the conception of human beings as instruments contrived by some force or activity which drives the process of evolution forward in pursuance of some purpose—the achievement, perhaps, of a more intense self-consciousness—a purpose which is certainly not furthered by men of intelligence ruminating gramminivorously in the country.

### *A Final Caution*

I promised, however, a second warning; it is mercifully brief. If,

### *He Complains of Civilization*

ignoring all that has been said, a sensitive modern, stampeding in loathing and terror from the machines and the civilization they have made, insists upon retiring to the country, let him not choose country that is picturesque, and let him not choose country that is by the coast. For no place that is picturesque, above all, no place that is on the coast, is free from machines. I have been staying recently at a very small village—it has only six houses and a pub—on the north Devon coast. Until eleven o'clock in the morning, after six o'clock at night, it is a place of ideal quiet and beauty. Between those hours it is an inferno; for, unfortunately, it can be reached by road. At eleven, the cars begin to arrive, and they continue to arrive for the rest of the day. By twelve-thirty the place is one vast throb of exploding petrol engines. Over the rocks the cars pour their human contents, and upon the rocks the human contents stay until the cars are ready to take them home again. Every house in the village supplies tea: there are 'Smugglers' Scones', 'Lorna Doone Cream', and teas served by the 'Three Maidens of Lea'. By six the noise has stopped, but the stink remains for another hour. The gods of the place—whoever they may be—departed years ago, exorcized by the smell of petrol and the family atmosphere. As a result, it is spiritually dead; it has a surface of great beauty, and below the surface there is nothing at all. Now if you do go to live in the country, it is essential that you should choose a place where the gods are still alive. And if you want to know what I mean by that, I can only refer you to the flirtings with animism which I have coyly set forth in Chapter IV.

## THE STARVED HAND

*On Making Things*

**T**he dignity of manual labour! A noble phrase and one often in the mouth of a speaker at a Conservative meeting which I have just attended at a Devonshire health resort. 'It is', he said, 'a very fine thing to work with one's hands, and one ought not to be ashamed to do it.' For once, I agreed with a Conservative speaker: I agreed, at least, with his statement 'It is a very fine thing to work with one's hands', but I disagree entirely with the unspoken premise that underlay it. For the unspoken premise was that most people, and certainly most working-class people, do, in fact, work with their hands and need reconciling to their work, whereas the truth of the matter is that, if working with one's hands means making things, then practically nobody but a few artists and anachronistic craftsmen work with their hands any more. The machines make things, and we tend the machines. Between making things and tending machines there is all the difference in the world. Making things, the job of the craftsman, is varied and exciting and calls out all the talents and faculties of a man; tending machines, the job of the robot, is dull and monotonous and stultifies them. The use of the hands in making things is, moreover, an inherited need which has been implanted by the long line of his prodigious ancestry in the consciousness, or, more frequently, which is lurking unsuspected in the unconscious self, of twentieth-century man.

*The Pleasures of Hand Using*

I told in the last chapter of the invasion of coastal solitudes by motor-buses. Daily they bring to this place, an old mill house where a stream runs into the sea, a horde of holiday-makers from a resort five miles away, where I listened to the speech of the Conservative candidate. I told, too, how the human contents of the buses make unanimously for the beach. It is a poor beach from their point of view, since it contains very little sand and is covered with large rocks and boulders. Having reached this rocky shore, they divide into two



## *He Complains of Civilization*

classes. Members of the first class try to make something. With their hands they build castles, dig ditches, trench, tunnel and mound, or try to catch shrimps. Their efforts are pitifully inadequate, but they are, nevertheless, happy; they are satisfying an instinct, and in so doing they are redressing, in however small a degree, the unbalanced development forced upon them by a civilization, which, giving employment to the head, has nothing to offer save routine operations to the hands. Most of the people I am watching belong to the lower middle class. For fifty weeks in the year they sit on their behinds using their brains; but except to hold a pen or to tap a typewriter, they use their hands not at all. One side of their natures is, it is obvious, being starved; hence, their present pleasure in feeding it. At home, they make chicken-runs and rabbit-hutches, dig in their gardens and mess about with the wireless; on holiday, they build sand castles and poke in rock pools. If they were a little richer or a little more enterprising, they would go climbing, feel for hand-holds, crimp their fingers, scarify their knees, coil and uncoil ropes; or they would take to sailing, entangle themselves in sheets and, hand on tiller, guide their yachts through the cloven waters. What is the pleasure in these things? The pleasure of unaccustomed danger? Scarcely—the danger, except perhaps for the rock climber, is negligible. It is the pleasure of straining limbs and tautened muscles, of swelling biceps and manipulating fingers, the pleasure, in a word, of the use of our bodies, and, above all, of our hands.

The use of the hands has been relegated by the machine to the obscure background of our lives; we use them for a fortnight on holiday, or for an hour of an evening in the backyard. And we use them not for work, but for play, for the building of make-believe castles, for the sailing of unnecessary boats, for the construction of useless cupboards. That they should have deprived a necessary human activity of all serious meaning is another count in the indictment against the machines. Overstraining some of our faculties, modern civilization leaves the rest to atrophy. We do our best to get our own back by using our hands when we can, but we use them frivolously and artificially as an entertainment of leisure, not naturally as an integral part of life.

### *Just Sitting*

But there is another count in the indictment and a more serious



## *The Starved Hand*

The second and the larger class of those who drift on to the beach outside my window, does just nothing at all. It walks a few yards perhaps fifty on to the rocks, and then, bankrupt of action, it sits. The man reads the paper, the woman sews, idly turns the pages of a magazine, or just sits; the children poke about in the pools. Are these people contentedly resting? They are not. The children, no doubt, are contented, but the adults are bored and disagreeable. How bored and how disagreeable, I can judge from the remarks which float up to me, as I sit at the window. The men are impatient with the women, the women nag at the men.

This, no doubt, is to a large extent the natural state of the married. No two people in the world could put up with the quantity of one another's company that most married people inflict upon each other without coming at times, indeed, at most times, to hate each the sight and sound of the other. Marriage, however, is not the sole source of the discontent of these couples. It arises, in part, from their need of occupation, coupled with complete inability to satisfy the need; and here again the machines are at fault. Most of us have become so dependent upon machines, both for our occupation and our leisure, that when we are without them we are completely at a loss. Deprived of radio, gramophone, car and cinema, modern man just sits. He does not know how to relax; he is without resources to amuse himself, and his mind does not contain the food of meditation. And so he just sits, miserably. . . .

The routine performance of ill-balanced and artificial work, the starvation of the hands, the inability to find occupation for leisure—all these are effects produced by machines upon human lives. I cannot believe that these effects, when prolonged, do not alter the human beings who are exposed to them, producing restlessness, neurosis, and, in extreme cases, madness. Nor are the extreme cases so very rare: one person out of eighty is, I understand, classed as mentally defective requiring treatment in institutions, and the proportion of defectives increases yearly. As for the normals, their restlessness, their boredom, their hysteria, their neurosis are recognized features of the age and have called into existence an army of doctors, psycho-analysts, faith-healers, therapists, theosophists, Christian scientists, dictators and quacks, religious, medical and political, to deal with them.

## *He Complains of Civilization*

### *Anticipated Evolution of Ear-Flaps*

There is a further strand in this rope of madness that the machines are weaving for us—the strand of noise. The complaint of noise is a familiar one, and I do not wish here to do more than to dot the i's and cross the t's of what most people would all too readily concede. For people, albeit belatedly, are at last beginning to realize the contribution which the noise of modern civilization makes to the insanity of its members. We turn up our noses at the Middle Ages because they had no drains and their streets stank badly. And not only the streets! Those great ladies of the Elizabethan Age, lacking silk and cotton underclothes, sewn up in wool which they changed biennially and encased in their terrific fortifications of embroidery, must have appallingly offended the sense of smell. We have saved our noses at the expense of our ears; the world may not stink to-day, but assuredly it was never so noisy. Where both are evil, the assault upon the sense of hearing is more deadly than that upon the sense of smell. We can stop our nostrils, but, as gunners discovered during the war, there is no effective method of stopping the ears. I have tried a dozen alleged devices for ear-stopping and am forced to agree with the gunners. Hence, the growing necessity for ear-flaps.

In a later chapter<sup>1</sup> I have played with the idea that life, sooner or later, evolves the capacities and characteristics of which living organisms stand in need. To man's psychological outfit I expect the addition of telepathy; his physiological equipment, I now predict, will be shortly reinforced by the evolution of ear-flaps to protect his sanity. As to the urgency of the need, there can be no two opinions; for my own part, I would give my left hand for a pair of effective ear-flaps.

Now the fount and origin of this great increase of noise in the modern world are the machines. The noise of men one can tolerate, for men get tired; to the noises of nature one gets accustomed, for, after all, they are natural. (Personally, I like the sounds of waterfalls, streams, the sea and the rain. Thunder wakes one up, but I do not mind being wakened up to look at the lightning. The crowing cock is the one natural noise that I have ever found to be a nuisance; the crowing cock and, on occasions, the night-long jugging of the night-ingale.) But the machines never get tired, and there is something in our natures which resents the inhumanly reiterated character of their

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII.

## *The Starved Hand*

noise. It is difficult to decide whether the unceasing regularity of machine-made noises is or is not more offensive than their explosive abruptness, whether the intolerably prolonged chugging and panting of the petrol-engine is or is not more destructive of quiet than the sudden stridency of the motor-horn. Both are not only destructive of quiet; they prevent concentration, they interfere with meditation, and when the imperfectly winged spirit seeks to take flight from the things of this world, a feat which, God knows, is at any time sufficiently difficult—they bring it back to earth with a jolt and root it there.

### *One Cannot Hit Back*

Of the outrage of modern noise, the chief, because the most pervasive agent is the car. Over wide stretches of the south of England it is becoming impossible to find a house that is not within range of the more or less continuous sound of the eructations of petrol-engines. To be protected from this noise is a luxury for which one must pay very highly; one must purchase houses on inaccessible hills, lay down private roads, or establish soundproof rooms. It is, indeed, one of the many paradoxes of our civilization that those goods which mankind has previously enjoyed so abundantly that men took them for granted, not realizing that they were goods—quiet and solitude and the opportunity to sit undisturbed in the sun—are to-day purchasable only at a very high figure.

One of the worst features of the noise of machines is that one cannot answer it back. Noise is a stimulus: when an organism is stimulated, it is natural for it to react. In primitive man the reactions took the form of some violent activity, whether of flight or attack. Hence, our sensitiveness to sound is an inherited reaction to stimuli, upon their ability to respond to which our ancestors were dependent for the preservation of their lives and the gratification of their needs. Now, to the constantly reiterated stimulus of modern noise no reaction is required—life, indeed, would be impossible if we were to jump each time we heard a car—and our normal reactions must, therefore, be inhibited. If one is lucky, one is unaware of this inhibiting process, but it occurs in all of us nevertheless, and under modern conditions it must occur all the time. The inhibition of our natural tendency to react to a stimulus absorbs valuable energy; if it absorbs too much, we become nervous wrecks. Neurasthenia is, in

## *He Complains of Civilization*

fact, the result of the dissipation in undesirable and superfluous ways of the energy which is required for the business of living.

Which profession contains the highest proportion of neurotics? Surprisingly, it is the Police Force. It is not your palpitating, nervous, highly strung little men that are given to nervous breakdowns, but your stolid policeman standing rooted four square to the world. Why? Because he also stands four-square to the traffic. From every side, from behind and from in front, from the left and from the right, for hours at a stretch he is subjected to the stimulus of noise, to which he must not react. He may regulate, check and direct the hooting, chugging cars, but he must not hit back at them, and the continual drafts upon his nervous energy which are required to suppress his natural reaction to hit back use up his store.

Presently, there is an overdraft and, in consequence, a nervous breakdown. It is natural for us to respond; we like, when stimulated, to be able to hit back at the things that stimulate us, and we like things that hit back at us. The Victorians sought the acme of comfort in the feather bed; than the feather bed, they could think of nothing which would hit back less. They were right, for, indeed, there is nothing which so little protests against the impact of the human form as the feather bed; but they were wrong in thinking this refusal to hit back on the part of the feather bed was a good thing. We like to react, even in our sleep, and we like things which, by hitting back, provoke our reactions. Hence, the modern spring mattress!

It is difficult to estimate how much of the power of the pulpit, how much of its delightfulness to its occupant, were derivable from the fact that the congregation could not answer the preacher back. Delightful to the preacher, the limitation was, however, galling to the congregation. To-day we do not listen to preachers, but we cannot help listening to cars. Noise for noise, I prefer those made in the larynxes of divines to those made in the entrails of explosive engines. Even the most voluble divines get tired, even the longest sermons come to an end; but the machines never get tired, the cars never come to an end and one cannot answer them back after the service is over.



Part Four

HE SCOLDS THE CIVILIZED

---

11

WOMEN, TASTES, AND FOOD OF  
THE ENGLISH

---

*The Betrayal of the Vote*

'You ought', I said, chiding the women under forty in the audience at my lecture, 'to be ashamed of yourselves,' and proceeded for the space of ten minutes to scold them. I cannot remember the words I used, for I was angry, but the substance of my denunciation is still clear to me. I recalled the struggle for recognition, for emancipation, for the vote. I dwelt upon the barriers of prejudice women had to overcome, the storm of ridicule they had to face, the derision of the common-rooms, the scepticism of the business offices, the guffaws of the smoking-rooms and the bars. Over all this they had triumphed; they had won the vote and established, at least in theory, the equality of the sexes. The barriers at any rate were down and in theory there was no longer reason why women should not become M.P.s, doctors, lawyers, editors, business executives.

Great things were prophesied from the incursion of women into public affairs. There was, it was understood, a certain category of questions which were specifically women's questions, prostitution and child welfare and maternal mortality; housing and the treatment of disease; above all questions of war and peace—for women, as providers both of the bomb-droppers and the bomb-fodder, were thought to have a special interest in the prevention of war—in regard to which women would bring to bear not only a distinctive point of view but a gust of reformist energy born of their impatience with the muddling of men, to translate their point of view into action.

I do not myself believe that these implicit assumptions which underlay the women's movement were wrong. Yet how totally they have been belied. Women can enter Parliament, yet at the time of writing only *eight* are in fact there, and, with the exception of Miss



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

Wilkinson and Lady Astor, they scarcely ever open their mouths. Certainly they have made no mark in the spheres in which it was thought they would have a specifically feminine contribution to offer. Slums are cleared and provision for infant-welfare is improved; but it can scarcely be said that the clearing and the improvement are the result of women's activity. Meanwhile, our divorce laws remain a scandal, the maternal mortality rate is still disgracefully high, the ferocity of the laws penalizing abortion is a barbarous anachronism, and the danger of war never greater. When a specifically woman's question is raised in the House, when, for example, gallant Miss Wilkinson brings in her Bill for equal pay for the same work in the Civil Service, two of the eight women refuse their support.

### *Political Apathy of Women*

That war is a question in regard to which women recognize that they have a distinctive interest, the unremitting activity of the Women's International League affords noble testimony. So too do such letters as that which, at the time of the Abyssinia affair, was sent to the papers by fifty-one well-known women representing twenty-three different women's organizations in response to the appeal of Princess Tsehai against 'the deliberate bombing of the Red Cross units by the Italians and their inhuman use of poison gas' as 'criminal acts which are against the laws of God and man and are justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world.' So too do such descriptions by a military correspondent of what the advance of civilization in Abyssinia in the winter months of 1935-6 actually looked like as the following: 'Screaming, shrieking masses which a minute before were men . . . horribly burned features . . . mouths writhing in agony, sufferings too awful to describe'—for is it conceivable that any woman can contemplate with equanimity such a fate for her children (the small children, we are told, are always the first to succumb to gas), let alone for herself? Yet the members of the protesting organizations are comparatively elderly women belonging for the most part to the generation which won the vote, and my denunciation of the young women in my audience was based on their lamentable refusal to carry on the work of their mothers.

The last generation of women won the right to sit in Parliament. The present refuses to vote for women candidates with such persistency that it is becoming increasingly difficult for a woman to

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

persuade a party organizer to let her fight a winnable seat. The last generation of women hoped that their victory would give women the chance to outlaw war. The present appears to feel no obligation to protest against preparations for a war more appalling than any which our ancestors knew, a war which would doom millions of them and their children to horrible deaths.

I doubt whether at any time during the last fifty years young women have been more politically apathetic, more socially indifferent than at the present time. This is not the view of a single, middle-aged complainant wondering in solitary spleen what the present generation is coming to. I am told that organizers in the Labour movement regard with bewildered despair the present generation of young people who, surfeited with cinemas and dances, dog-racing and the wireless, ice-cream and peanuts, cannot be induced to take any serious interest in politics. Occasionally in London one gets the impression that young women are fleetingly aware of the danger that threatens our civilization, though, even for London women, the thought of the next war is like one of those faces, which, once seen, is never remembered. But in provincial society—I am at the moment of writing sampling it in the Lake District—nothing of the slightest public interest is ever discussed. One has, indeed, the impression that even to refer to such a subject as the possibility of war, or the means of its prevention, is a social indelicacy.

### *Making the Worst of Both Worlds*

It may be asked, what would I have women do. That is their business. Here, however, is one example of what they might do. There is in America an admirable society which exists for the advertisement of peace. It covers posters and hoardings with peace slogans; it pays for peace wireless talks over the radio. There is no need to describe the advertisements; they are such as one can imagine for oneself. I remember one which, appearing at the end of 1936, explained, I know not with what truth, that the number of pounds spent by the world on armaments in the current year was exactly equal to the number of minutes (or was it seconds?) which had elapsed since the death of Christ, who taught that war is un-Christian and whose teaching the Western World was officially supposed to follow. Let us have such a society in this country. The one requisite is money to pay for advertisements in papers, space on hoardings,

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

and short films at the cinemas. Before the war money poured into the coffers of the W.S.P.U. in order that women might win the vote which, it was hoped, would enable them to make war a thing of the past. The vote is won, but war is very far from being a thing of the past. Is it unreasonable to ask that contemporary women should be prepared to give as much energy and money, to suffer as much obloquy and insult in the cause of peace, as their mothers gave and suffered in the cause of equality? If it is, then the sooner they give up the pretence of playing with public affairs and return to private life the better. If they cannot make a job of the House of Commons, let them at least make something of their own houses. If they cannot learn to save men from the destruction which incurable male mischiefousness bids fair to bring upon them, let women at least learn to feed them, before they destroy themselves. For it is time to look at the other side of the picture and to ask what, during these feminine incursions into public life, has become of the household arts which women now affect to despise. What, in other words, as the result of women's increasing but futile participation in men's work, has become of women's?

### *North Country Sandwich and Hotel*

It is ten minutes past six, and I have just been deposited on a platform at X— Station. I am going to B— to lecture and I have twenty minutes to wait for my train. These twenty minutes offer the only chance of food and drink for some hours to come. I go to the refreshment room accordingly, and ask what there is to eat. There are, it seems, cakes; there is chocolate; there is tea; there is also bread and butter—very dusty, this last. Is there, I ask, no meat? Yes, there is a sandwich, one only; it contains ham. I say that I will have this sandwich. The ham turns out to consist almost entirely of fat and there is no mustard. It costs 4d.

The same evening, just before ten o'clock, I find myself back again at X— Station, stranded at X— for the night. Mercifully, there is an early train in the morning, and, as I do not want to lodge too far from the station, I repair to the company's hotel, the XY<sup>1</sup>, which

<sup>1</sup> The law of libel forbids me to risk giving the names of this place and of its hotel, although, as the bill to which I refer below is still in my possession, the risk would, I hope, for the credit of the law, be small.

## Women, Tastes, and Food of the English

adjoins it. This turns out to be a grand affair, very grand indeed, and I wonder ruefully what my night there will cost me. I comfort myself with the reflection that I shall at least get a good meal.

I hate hotels. They make me feel lonely, miserable and unimportant. While I am in them, I believe that the world has forgotten me. Whereas most of my life is spent in avoiding the importunities of those who do me the honour of voluntarily seeking my acquaintance, warding off callers, failing to meet the eyes of people in tubes and lifts, lurking in solitude in my club, I have only to enter an hotel, to become a lost dog, longing for somebody to take notice of me. I look at people wistfully, hoping that they will talk to me, and when they do not, I shamelessly take the initiative, and insist on drawing into conversation the most unlikely and unwilling persons.

Hence, in part, my unwonted extravagance in this matter of the XY Hotel. I am feeling a little low anyway, and it is exceedingly unlikely that entering an hotel at ten o'clock at night, I shall succeed in entrapping anybody into conversation. Very well, then, since I am probably in any event condemned to a certain loneliness of spirit, I must make what shift I can to soothe and gratify my body. I will have a good meal and I will be comfortable.

I book a room—a double one, it appears, is the only room available; a pity this, for although it costs no more, the half-empty bed will only emphasize my loneliness—and go to the dining-room. It is dark and deserted, but I turn on the lights and in due course a waiter appears. In answer to my anxious enquiry, he assures me that I *can* have something to eat, provided that I don't mind it being cold. The kitchen, he says, is closed, the cook departed, and he can only get me whatever cold stuff there may be in the pantry. The cold stuff in the pantry turns out to be ham, tongue and cold beef. I choose the cold beef, and, there being no potatoes or other vegetables, eke it out with bread and with piccalilli from a jar. One does not, of course, ask for table wine in an English railway hotel, but the beer is generally tolerable, and beer would be just the thing for such a meal—draught Bass, in fact. But there is no draught Bass; in fact, there is no draught beer of any kind. There is only bottled beer, and I have a Worthington. After that I am offered cheese—the ordinary mass-produced Canadian cheddar, which, since it is completely tasteless, I reject—and finish my meal, as best I can, with toast which the waiter makes for me, butter and, surprisingly, marmalade. I also



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

have a pot of tea. Not a very comforting meal, but what I ask myself, can one expect, English hotels being what they are? I am sufficiently tired to go straight to bed, but my supper sits heavily upon me and I sleep badly. In the morning I get breakfast, a plentiful and abundant breakfast, on the London train, and I have, therefore, only to pay for last night's accommodation. The bill is staggering, 17s. Of this amount my bed cost 9s. 6d. and my supper 7s. 6d. The beef, bread and marmalade are together 5s., a sherry—I forgot to mention that I began with a glass of sherry—1s., the tea 6d., and the beer, the bottled beer, which everywhere else, except in trains, is 8d. a bottle, and in trains 9d., is a shilling.

### *English Food and French*

The badness of English hotels is often asserted, and as often denied, denied angrily and indignantly. Why, we are asked, are we so anxious to find fault with our own country, so ready to discover merit in whatever is foreign? How unpatriotic of us, how un-English! Now, to a healthy palate, uncorrupted by French flummeries. . . . The strain is familiar, and I will not continue it. It is the strain of the Association of Hotel Proprietors, or whatever the appropriate body may be, defending itself and the food that it supplies.

For my part, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be able honestly to commend English hotels and wholeheartedly to enjoy English cooking. I would like to praise the English, and, other things being equal, would sooner have a good meal in England than a good meal in France. But what, in the face of such an experience as I have described, is one to do? Is one to make no complaint at all? But that is to condone the enormities one condemns. Is one to keep silent because it is one's own country that serves one such sorry fare? I fail to see why. For how is it possible not to contrast treatment such as that which I have described with one's reception in similar circumstances in France?

It so happened that at the time of my misfortune at X—— I had had a recent experience of a meal in France served in almost exactly similar circumstances. Not wishing to spend the night in the train, I had at ten o'clock descended upon the platform of Tarascon Station. The hotel adjoins the station, and the station restaurant was also that of the hotel. As at X——, I asked for something to eat. With profuse apologies, it was explained to me that unfortunately it was



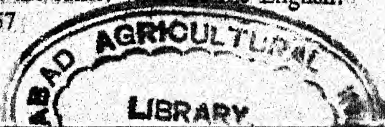
## Women, Tastes, and Food of the English

too late for the dinner, but that *le patron* would be only too glad to see what could be done for me. I sat down, drank a Cinzano and almost immediately there appeared *hors-d'œuvres*. An omelette followed of just the right consistency, intriguingly flavoured with a sprinkling of a herb unknown to me. Then came cold veal with a fresh salad, delightfully dressed, some wild strawberries with cream, and a delicious cheese—Munster, it was called, a cheese which comes, I believe, from the Vosges country. Cheeses are, in my opinion, the very poetry of food, and there is no cheese fit to be compared with a French cheese. This particular one was sprinkled with caraway seeds and washed down with the remains of a bottle of Chateaufort afforded a noble end to the meal. At X—I had to take aspirins in order to sleep; at Tarascon, though the trains were noisier, I slept the sleep of an organism in complete harmony with the contents of its stomach. I would ask the reader to note that no part of this meal, except the omelette, was cooked, and that the total charge, in spite of the state of the exchange (74 francs to the pound) was considerably less than that of the beef and bottled beer at X—.

### Question for Examinees

Fresh from these two experiences, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of proposing to all persons responsible for the setting of papers for candidates taking examinations in history, psychology, anthropology, economics, or philosophy—for the subject is germane to all these branches of enquiry—at our universities, that they should insert the following compulsory question: 'Among all civilized peoples there appears to be a general consensus of agreement in regard to the following propositions: (1) That eating and drinking are essential ingredients in the good life; (2) that cooking is an art; (3) that food properly cooked is pleasant in itself; (4) that it is also an aid to good temper and a promoter of good feeling. The French, accordingly, treat cooking as an art and serve good and varied meals. The English despise cooking and their meals are, taking them by and large, execrable. What is the reason for the difference?'

Let me try to answer the question myself. The French attitude requires, it is obvious, no explanation at all. It is natural, it is right, it is delightful; it is its own justification, and in a good world we should be able to take it for granted. The world is not good, but I propose to take it for granted all the same. What of the English?



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

There are, I think, four main reasons why English food is as it is, of which one is creditable and the other three discreditable.

### *(1) Easygoingness of the English*

First, there is the easy-going tolerance which is one of the most endearing and valuable characteristics of my countrymen. We don't like complaining, we don't like causing a fuss, and we don't like making ourselves unpleasant, unless we are positively driven to it. Rather than do these things, we will put up with a good deal in the matter of bad food and overcharging, and shrug our shoulders as we pay the bill. For it is we rather than the French who are the shoulder-shrugging race, spiritually and clandestinely, of course, since we do not wish to call attention to ourselves by overt manifestations of feeling.

Now this easy-going tolerance of the English seems to me to be wholly admirable. It is responsible for our peculiar political system and our admirable political practice, for our sense of fairness, our praiseworthy endeavour to see the other side of the question and our willingness to give it, when seen, a show, for our refusal to prosecute the heretic and the eccentric, for our willingness to live and let live. 'It is founded on indifference,' do you say? Partly, no doubt, you are right. But there is something more positive here than indifference, and that positive thing is a good thing. And since I am about to grumble and to scold to the extent of several pages, I would like to give us, where there is doubt, what benefit of the doubt I can. We really like, then, we English, to make the best of things; and even if we know that the things might have been better, our disposition is charitably to suppose that the man who is responsible for them, unsatisfactory as they are, is 'doing his best'. Comforted by this thought, we are willing to accept intention as a substitute for achievement. In no sphere is this willingness put to a more severe test than in that of cookery.

### *(2) Philistinism of the English. Music and Painting*

But tolerance shades by imperceptible degrees into indifference, and our indifference is definitely culpable. There is an element of grossness and insensitivity in the English. We are, to put it bluntly, Philistines. We do not lend ourselves readily to the things of the mind or the spirit; we do not take easily to beauty in any of the

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

forms in which it presents itself, and many of us do not take to it at all. Now this Philistinism of the average Englishman is quite compatible with the highest flights of the spirit on the part of the non-average that the human race has yet achieved. Thus our poetry is the finest in point of quality and the most abundant in point of quantity of that of any people.

Consider in this connection the case of English music. Once we had the capacity for producing lovely music, and Byrd and Matthew Locke and Purcell are among the greatest musicians of any time. To-day, there is so little production of first-rate music in England, so much amateurishness and so little professionalism, so much jazz and so little singing, that the Germans have every justification for their description of us as 'das Land ohne Musik'. Puritanism and the Industrial Revolution killed the native music of the Tudors and the Stuarts, subordinated art to wealth, and the cultivation of beauty to the pursuit of power. As a consequence, our great artists have for the last three hundred years been men apart, neglected or, if noticed, ridiculed by the many. In no country, indeed, has the prophet, especially if he be artist and not moralist, created by life to give the world a new vision of beauty rather than a new conception of duty, had so little honour as in our own. Three hundred years ago we had, I repeat, musicians fit to rank with any of those that have come afterwards; but we do not listen to them. Even the patriotic B.B.C. rarely permits Purcell to be heard over the wireless; outside a small circle of musical initiates, Byrd is unknown, while we have to thank a foreigner, Dolmetsch, for introducing us to the loveliness of the music produced by the Englishmen who lived in the sixteenth century.

We have produced few great painters, and we pay little attention to their work. As time goes on, we pay less. Sir Robert Witt has recently published figures showing the decline in the number of English who go to see the world's great pictures: It is, perhaps, necessary to explain that the phrase 'great pictures' refers to the masterpieces of the art of painting, and not to the contemporary products of the screen. In 1928, 665,000 people went to the National Gallery; in 1934, the number of visitors had dropped to 531,000. The comparative attendances for the same years at the Tate were 349,000 and 262,000; at the Wallace Collection 131,000 and 75,000. During the period in question the number of persons visiting the applied science museum at South Kensington showed a marked increase. At the

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

applied science museum are seen, not pictures, but the models of machines.

### *The Absence of Poetry*

The writing of poetry among us is a dying art. For this, no doubt, the modern poets are in part to blame. But we read the great men of the Victorian and the Elizabethan ages far less than our fathers did. I recently had occasion to ask a crowded audience who were the authors of the two famous pieces of love poetry which Virginia Woolf quotes in *A Room of One's Own*:

*'There has fallen a splendid tear from the passion flower at the gate ...'*  
and

*'My heart is like a singing bird  
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot ...'*

Only two members of the audience confessed to knowing these poems and only two could cite their authors. It is the absence of poetry, and especially of the poetry of love, standing as it does for a 'sort of humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting', a noise which she senses as a 'murmur or a current behind' which, it will be remembered, constitutes, in Mrs. Woolf's view, the chief difference between the conversations that took place between intelligent persons before the war and after it. Well, whatever may have been the case before the war, we don't read poetry after it, or if we do, we do it on the quiet and take care not to get found out. I, at any rate, never by any chance catch one of my acquaintances in the act. But, I doubt if there is even much *secret* poetry reading. A modern English poet's reputation rests on the sale of a few hundred copies. One of the best known of the younger English poets who writes for reputable journals and broadcasts his own work, had, to my knowledge, a sale of eighty-one copies for his first book. I recently talked to a Russian poet who was giving a demonstration of poetry speaking at the Russian Embassy. He told me that the combined sales of his own works and those of two other poets who accompanied him were two and a half million.

### *The Non-Aesthetic English*

As with music, painting and poetry, so with all the forms in which



## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

beauty manifests itself. Alone among the great nations we support neither a National Opera House nor a National Theatre. So small is the home demand for the first-rate in drama and music, that England is the one European country of importance in which great plays and great music cannot as a rule be produced unless they are subsidized and, broadly speaking, they are not subsidized. The fact that we are never done talking of the wonders of Glyndebourne and the public spirit of Mr. Christie is a measure of the unrepresentativeness of Mr. Christie. A rich man arises and spends his money like a cultivated gentleman, and the fact is so surprising that we simply cannot 'get over it'. As a consequence, it is harder to hear great opera well produced or to see great drama in London than in any other capital city of civilized Europe. Even the Nazis have a better record in this respect. . . .

### *The Civil List*

For the rest, we value the non-utilitarian pursuits of art, science and learning so little that the smallness of the amounts granted for Civil List pensions—£1,200 in the year 1936—excites a feeling of shame even among Members of Parliament. I would dearly like to file the noses of every one of my readers against the scale of values which the minuteness of this grant implies. We all, do we not, love the highest when we see it? We are all looking vaguely forward to a Utopian leisure in which we shall pursue pure knowledge and cultivate pure beauty? Admirable! But here, to be going on with, are men who have so cared for knowledge, have been imbued with such a passion for beauty, have felt so strongly the impulse to help their kind, that they have insisted in the face of every temptation to private profit or personal gain, upon their right to do pure research in science, in art to paint pictures or to compose music which were in advance of the contemporary taste, and in medicine and surgery to experiment with new and unexplored processes often at the gravest personal risk. Because of their preoccupation with these impersonal ends and their indifference to the advantages of private gain, they have lived poor and comfortless lives. They grow old and can work no more, or they die and leave penniless widows. Their services are by now acknowledged, the originality of their work understood and appreciated, their discoveries exploited. They stand visibly before the world as men in whom the human spirit has risen to a higher level



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

of disinterested service, has burned with a brighter flame of intellect than in the general run of their contemporaries. And all that the State can spare to keep them and their families from want is a beggarly £1,200 a year.

No, we are not an æsthetic race. Taking us by and large we do not, I repeat, care over much for the things of the mind, and we are not sensitive to beauty. To beauty, or to ugliness! Cross the Channel from Dieppe to Newhaven, and as you near the English coast, you cannot fail to be struck by the magnificence of the Seven Sisters. I must have made the crossing a score of times; yet always these seven dramatic white curves—in fact there are nine, or is it ten?—cut in the face of the green cliff make me catch my breath with their loveliness. Behind are great folds of green down stretching one beyond another as far as the eye can see. It is, indeed, a wonderful approach, and it is reasonable to suppose that a people who valued beauty would have seen to it that it should have been left in its loveliness to welcome the stranger, as an earnest of the greater loveliness of the England behind. A venturesome people might even have sought to embellish the beauty of nature with the works of man. But even the most indifferent, one would have imagined, would have been at pains to ensure that no unworthiness in the latter should be allowed to detract from the beauty of the former. . . . One would have been wrong. As one's boat approaches the land, one sees the green of the downs scarred with the familiar rash of angry pink. The town of Seaford has been allowed to burst like a bomb and to scatter its débris of shacks and villas broadcast over the surrounding country. The houses, scattered haphazard, nevertheless suggest the malevolent design of ruining the largest possible extent of country with the smallest possible quantity of slate and concrete. As one runs into Newhaven Harbour, one is welcomed to England by a sprawl of little mean buildings, shacks and shanties and tarred sheds which have been allowed to proliferate over the quay-side without plan or order. No! We are not an æsthetic race. We do not naturally create beauty, and we are not concerned to protect the beauty that has come down to us.

### *Pursuits of the Modern English*

What, then, do we do? We go to football matches and the movies. What do we talk about? Sport, generally, and politics occasionally.

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

If, however, we are women, we talk about men and about other women. We prefer jazz and thrillers to Bach and Flaubert, bathing belles on the covers of magazines to the pictures of Picasso or Cézanne, watching games to acquiring knowledge, going to the movies to reading by the fire. Our standards, in fact, are very low. Personally I suspect that they always have been low, that the great mass of Englishmen has at all times been sunk in brutishness of spirit and apathy of intellect, and that the apparent lowering of standards with which critics charge the post-war world, is due not to the fact that the tastes of the masses have declined, but to the fact that they have asserted themselves. The ordinary man is not more ordinary, but he is more articulate, and now that he can at last read, hogwash is poured forth to satisfy his needs.

### *The English Gulf*

The English, I suspect, are distinguished among all other nations by the width of the gulf that separates the 'intellectuals' from the others. Such intellectual life as there is in England is of good quality; its standards are exacting, its level of taste high. The level of conversation in the Senior Common Room of King's College, Cambridge, or of All Soul's, Oxford is, I suspect, as high as may be found anywhere in the world. (It may even be the case, as King's men often insist, that King's College, Cambridge is the most cultivated place in the world, although, I suspect, the assertion that it is so, is incompatible with the fact asserted, since the really cultivated do not announce the fact of their cultivation, any more than the really virtuous are conscious of the fact of their virtue. To know that one is virtuous is to be complacent and is to that extent to be diminished in respect of one's virtue; to know that one is cultivated is to be self-conscious and to that extent to be diminished in respect of one's cultivation. I notice that Balliol makes no such claim.)

Our intellectuals are, however, very few, and the places in which they are to be found can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. They are in Oxford and Cambridge, in Bloomsbury, in Hampstead and in Chelsea. There is a sprinkling of them still in Manchester, though it is smaller than it used to be, and there are a few representatives of the tribe in Edinburgh. There are one or two country colonies—in Sussex, for example, and in Bucks—and there is the usual number of isolated intellectuals running to lushness and eccentricity in

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

the wilderness, for which England has always been famous. At an outside estimate I should put the total number at about seventy-five thousand—seventy-five thousand out of a population of over forty million.

### *A Bewildered Frenchman*

I recently talked with a Frenchman who was enjoying his first experience of English society. He was staying, poor man, in a small London hotel, and he had been extensively lunched and dined by persons belonging to the English middle class. As a result, he was a very bewildered man. He could not make head or tail of his experiences, and he could not relate them to his expectations. The English he had believed to be on a level of civilization equivalent to, though different from, that of the French. This belief had been chiefly founded on an acquaintance with the works of English writers. For years he had been steeped in the great English classics. He was a devotee of Shakespeare; he had dipped into the English philosophers, Locke and Hume and Mill; he was widely read in the nineteenth-century English novelists; and he had not unnaturally believed that these authors whom he so loved and admired—Pope and Dryden, Dickens and Scott, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, even Shaw and Wells—were, broadly speaking, representative of the great mass of their countrymen. Ordinary Englishmen, he conceded, could not be expected to be as talented as these great writers, but they would at least be recognizably of the same species; they would at least subscribe to their interests and share their tastes. Culture, in fact, in England as in France, would be diffused in some degree through the nation as a whole.

Now this belief, founded on his acquaintance with the works of great Englishmen, my friend had found to be a total delusion. English culture was not, it seemed, diffused through every class; on the contrary it was the perquisite of a few totally unrepresentative intellectuals. The ordinary Englishman, it appeared, was as incapable of reading as of writing great literature; literature, in fact, was the pursuit of a few cliques and coteries and of isolated individuals. As with literature, so with philosophy and science, with whatever, indeed, belonged to the world of ideas and evoked the activity of the mind. Ordinary English society, it seemed, was devoid of intellectual interests. It did not discuss books; it did not exchange ideas; it had

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

no knowledge and no desire for knowledge outside the special departments in which its members happened to function, and it was without intellectual curiosity. Its conversation turned monosyllabically upon sport, plays, films and personal relations. Rooted in the particular, it shied violently at any attempt to introduce it to the general. Shivering in the cold draughts of the abstract, its members fled with all possible speed to the warm shelter of the known and comforting concrete.

These impressions of my French acquaintance related mainly to the world of ideas. But they applied equally, he thought, to the sphere of art. Music and pictures were not, he found, subjects of normal discussion. Discussed, admittedly, they were; not, however, for themselves, but because of the new entrance they afforded into the realm of the personal. For example, music! 'How large was the audience at Miss A's Beethoven concert, and did you see Miss X?' 'No, but Mr. Y was there, sitting in the second row. I don't know who the woman was with him, certainly not his wife; but she talked, I thought most rudely, while Miss A was playing.' Pictures! 'Were you at Mr. B's private view yesterday? Everybody was looking at his cartoon of old P. He must have got some grudge against the old boy to do him like that. Absolute libel, I call it.' And so on, and so on. My friend's conclusion was that the English are not cultivated persons. They are very kind and very easy-going, but they have no conversation, and their tastes are those of barbarians, schoolboys and mechanics. Like barbarians and schoolboys they are interested in the concrete and the particular; like mechanics they love to know how things work.

Listening to this tirade, I who had come to take it for granted that nine people out of ten shared none of my interests, that the average Englishman was not concerned with literature, music, art, science, philosophy, that the communication of ideas was a very rare thing, and that one was lucky when one chanced to participate in it—I who understood only too well the gulf which in England separates the small band of intellectuals from the great mass of normals, was suddenly made to realize what an odd thing that gulf was. Reflecting upon what I knew of Europe, I came to the conclusion that in no other European country is it as wide as it is in our own, and that in France, the country I know best, it can scarcely be said to exist at all. Enter any bourgeois French household, and you will find literature



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

and art, science and philosophy, being discussed just as freely and just as normally as money, disease, and personal relations.

I have dwelt upon this matter of the lowness of English standards in the sphere of art, and upon the prevalence of English indifference to intellectual interests, because these things seem to me to constitute the general pervasive condition of which the toleration of bad cookery and the insensitiveness to bad food constitute a particular example. It is not so much that we don't mind our cooking being bad, as that we don't know that it is bad; and we don't know that it is bad because, to put it bluntly, we have low standards of values, or none at all. Let me illustrate.

### *A French Chef comes to London*

From time to time a new restaurant, opening with *brio*, announces that it proposes to offer to its clientele the very best cooking in London. Inevitably, it engages its *chef* from France, and he is undoubtedly a very good *chef* indeed. The meals which he supervises are carefully planned, cunningly prepared, exquisitely cooked, delightfully served. For a period of about six months, this admirable standard is maintained. Then, insensibly, it begins to decline. In eighteen months the cooking is neither better nor worse than in any one of a hundred other London restaurants. I have several times asked French friends for an explanation of this deterioration in the work of their accomplished countrymen when they come to England, and unanimously they have ascribed it to the lack of that informed criticism which, they say, is necessary to keep a *chef* up to his standard. First-rate cooking, like first-rate work in any other art, involves not only creative ability but constant effort and unremitting endeavour. It demands an infinite care for detail and an incessant watchfulness. The faculties of the cook must, in other words, be screwed continuously up to concert pitch. Now the *chef* cannot, any more than the painter or the musician, do his best work unappreciated. He cannot function in a vacuum; he must know and be known by his clientele; he must establish a *rapport* with them, and he must be continuously conscious of the play of a critical and informed appreciation. In England he lacks this consciousness. If an unimaginatively chosen, ill-cooked, badly served meal is set before an Englishman, there is only one chance in a hundred that he will reject it; only one in ten that he will complain. And, contrariwise, if



## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

he is unexpectedly presented with a meal well-chosen, properly cooked, elegantly served, it is most unlikely that he will notice the fact; still more unlikely that, if he does notice it, he will go out of his way to comment and to praise. Now Frenchmen habitually praise when the food is good and no less habitually denounce when it is bad, thus establishing a standard of watchful and vocal criticism which keeps the *chef* on the alert and up to the mark.

### *(3) Puritanism of the English*

There is, thirdly, the Puritanism of the English. We are apt to think that a too great enjoyment of food betokens self-indulgence, a too great interest in it a gross and sensual nature. When the English concern themselves with the theory of food at all, their attitude is apt to be strictly utilitarian. It is the hygienic not the hedonic properties of nourishment that interest them, its health, not its pleasure value that they discuss. Is the diet well-balanced? Does it contain the requisite number of calories? Is it sufficiently rich in vitamins? Is its nutritious value the highest that can be obtained for the money? Is it easily digested? These are the questions which we naturally ask when we are required to concern ourselves with the theory of food, looking to eating not as an end in itself, but as a means to a healthy state of body. That the proper and sufficient end of eating is to give pleasure is overlooked, or, if the pleasure be admitted, it is apt to be frowned upon.

Why the pleasures of the palate should be discriminated against in this way is not clear. We do not regard the man who lives for music as self-indulgent, nor do we censure the pleasure derived from the contemplation of pictures. On the contrary, we regard the musician as a person of enviably cultivated sensibility, and give schoolgirls half-holidays to go to picture galleries. Yet what do the musician and the art critic do but gratify excessively, outrageously and without stint or scruple the senses of hearing and seeing?

It may be said that Puritanism discriminates against the pleasures of the palate and against these only because the effects of over-indulgence in food are bad, that the breath becomes evil, the complexion blotched, the body gross, the figure distorted, the appearance repulsive, the temper uncertain. I do not deny it. But who ever mentioned over-indulgence? It is not with the eating of much food that I am concerned, but with the eating of food properly chosen,

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

prepared and cooked. It is not quantity that I advocate, but quality. So far from good cooking leading to excessive eating, the very reverse tends to occur. Paradoxically, the better the food, the less of it one eats.

### *My Gastronomic Day*

When I am at home and can command my own diet, it is a comparatively light one. I have no breakfast. I have a tendency to stoutness—the result, I hasten to assure the censorious reader, of heredity rather than of gluttony—and I find it much easier to do without certain meals altogether than perpetually to be restraining myself during the meals which I do have. And so, instead of breakfast, I have half a glass of orange juice. At 11.15 I have a cup of coffee. This is not the murky fluid which in England usually disgraces the name by which it is miscalled, but is carefully made from coffee freshly ground and properly mixed with chicory, which means that it has taken the best part of an hour in the making. Lunch at one consists normally of only one cooked course. But whether it is fish—salmon or sole, or meat—veal, for example cut into slices, steeped in a sauce which has never known the inside of tin or bottle but has been made for the occasion at the same time as and in conjunction with the preparation of the veal, and served with green salad and vegetables according to the season, or a ragout, or a stew, which has been elaborately and carefully prepared and is distinguished by a specific character of its own, the result of a peculiar combination of flavours designed in advance—it is a pleasure in the expecting, a joy in the eating, and a benison in the looking back upon. There follows cheese—Brie or Camembert, if I can get them good—and that does not very often happen in England—or an English cheese sent direct from the country, a Wensleydale, say, from Yorkshire, or a Caerphilly. Cheeses from the colonies, in common with almost all other foods from the colonies, are anathema and not allowed to cross the threshold of the house. (Why is it, I wonder, that the mere circumstance of being shone upon by the Imperial Sun that never sets should be fatal to wine and tobacco?) At tea-time I only drink tea, but I have a reasonably substantial meal in the evening. My object being not to dwell upon my meals but to emphasize their moderation, I shall not trouble the reader with a description of my dinner.

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

### *Gastronomy Away from Home*

Now let us suppose that I am staying in a great house or at an average country hotel of the Trust House type. I am given for breakfast first porridge, then fish; bacon and eggs follow, topped off with toast, butter and marmalade. For lunch there will probably be a joint of some sort, followed by a suety pudding garnished with jam or a floury sauce. These English puddings are usually distinguished by some undistinguishing name, such as, Queen's pudding, or Cumberland pudding, or Manchester pudding, or Cabinet pudding, but, whatever the name by which it is designated, the pudding is in fact always the same—a stodgy, ill-cooked mess of bread or dough steeped in jam or sauce. (If by any chance the pudding is studded with currants—and such puddings are at least tolerable—there are never enough of them.) There will be a biggish tea, with bread and butter, jam and cakes, the jam bearing little specific relation to any known fruit, yet vaguely recalling them all, and the cakes, shop bought, exhibiting a delusive crust of icing which roofs an unassimilable mass of stale and tasteless sponge. In due course there will be dinner, the same as lunch only more elaborate.

None of the food being properly cooked and none of it having any distinctive taste, I eat more of it than I ought to eat and considerably more than I really want, in a vain endeavour to still the promptings of my continuously stimulated, but never satisfied palate. As a result, I consume far more quantitatively than I do at home, and I grow fat and puffy in consequence.

No, it is not quantity that I am advocating, nor can a devotion to the claims of the palate be censured on the grounds of a gluttonous over-indulgence. Why, then, is it censured at all? Why, though it is considered permissible in every other sphere to refine and sharpen the senses, so that seeing and hearing are no longer the passive reception of stimuli brought to bear upon the sense organs, but become conscious and deliberate enjoyments, activities which spread out beyond the confines of sensory gratification to enrich the soul and elevate the spirit, why—I repeat the question—is the cultivation of the palate looked at so askance? I confess I do not know, unless it be—and here I come to my fourth and final reason, the reason which brings my argument back to the point from which it started—that cooking is done for the most part by women, and women in England being too proud, or too stupid, or too lazy to do it properly, seek to

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

justify their inefficiency by spreading the legend that a preoccupation with food is not quite 'nice', and to excuse themselves for the all too obvious fact that their meals are not enjoyable with the suggestion that 'nice people' do not too much or too obviously enjoy their meals. Thus smokers maintain that tobacco ash is good for the carpet, fishermen that fish, being cold-blooded, do not mind having their throats dragged out of them with a hook, and Italians that Abyssinians really like being civilized by Italians. And so it is that Englishwomen, when taxed with what, had they any sense of shame, they could not but regard as the humiliating superiority of French cooks, console themselves with the reflection that it is only the baser side of men's nature that sets store by good cooking and that, since it is base, it is only right that it should be mortified; and equally, they imply, it is only to be expected that French women, being what they are, should go out of their way to appeal to and to indulge it.

### *(4) Englishwomen*

For—and here at last I come to the root of the matter—it is our women who are, in the long run, responsible for the badness of our food. Women, the fact is, alas, all too obvious, do not themselves care about food, and when they live together, they are found to feed meagrely and repulsively. I have met in my life many young women living singly or in pairs in flats, feeding almost exclusively on sardines, tinned fruit and poached eggs. They never prepare meals; it is too much trouble. They take out of tins or boxes meals that Messrs. Lyons have already prepared for them. They do not cook food; they have not the skill. They warm up food that has already been cooked by others. The food in women's clubs is almost uniformly bad. If the clubs are expensive, it is pretentious and bad; if cheap, it is simple and bad. The best restaurants in London are chop-houses and grill-rooms attended mainly or even solely by men, and the typist who starves herself on tea and bread and butter, fried fish and baked beans in order that she may have enough money to spare for dress and cosmetics is an only too familiar figure. Nor can this indifference to food be laid exclusively at the doors of the suburban middle class. There is a belief fostered in Labour circles that working-class women, especially in the north, are prodigies of household skill, whose domestic virtues put the ex-typist wives of London clerks to shame. It is, in particular, believed as an article of faith that



## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

the Lancashire or Yorkshire housewife is 'a champion cook'. This belief is a delusion. It may once have been true, but if it was, it is true no longer. I have before me the report of the Medical Officer of Health for a large Lancashire industrial district. The report is based upon questions addressed to schoolchildren with a view to discovering the content of the meals they eat at home. These, it appears, were scarcely ever cooked. Potatoes appeared in the form of chips, meat figured only in the shape of shop-bought pies, fruit was uniformly taken out of tins. Not only did the typical working-class diet contain few cooked foods, it contained practically no fresh ones. It lacked eggs, fresh fruit, fish and vegetables, not because these were dear, but—the Medical Officer is careful to emphasize the point—because these things required cooking, or at any rate preparation, and this the housewives were not prepared to give. One other point, this tinned diet scarcely ever varied. It was the same in the hottest August as it was in the coldest December.

No, Englishwomen are not interested in food. They are interested so little that they will sacrifice the health and digestions of their families on the altar of their indifference. You never, for example, in England hear two women talking together about the preparation of food, though you sometimes hear them discussing the price of food. And having no natural interest in food, our women call sour grapes at the pleasures of the table, and do their best to see that men, with their keener palates, shall not experience an enjoyment denied to themselves.

### *Return to the Sandwich*

It is to the general, if unspoken belief, engendered and fostered by women that there is something slightly indelicate about food, and that, the less of it we can make shift to do with, the better, that, I conceive, we owe the sandwich, a comestible which, though universal in England and America, is practically unknown outside those countries. The sandwich is, in my view, a thing wholly abominable. Even if the bread be fresh, the meat tender, tasty and succulent—and these conditions are so rarely realized, that there is only one place known to me in London where it is possible to count upon obtaining what is, by the standards appropriate to the sandwich, a good sandwich—the radical fault in its basic pattern and structure would still disqualify the sandwich as an article of civilized diet. This fault is one



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

of proportion; the proportion of bread is twice as great as it should be relatively to the amount of meat. Nobody would spontaneously eat such a great quantity of bread; it is only the *force majeure* of the sandwich which compels us to this unnatural dietary. Moreover, the very fact that the bread must be cut into flat, square or triangular segments precludes the use of all but the duller varieties. French bread, for example, in all its delightful forms, refuses to accommodate itself to the exigencies of the sandwich. The sandwich, again, is troublesome to cut, and the preparation of many sandwiches is a task which Englishwomen undertake with so little care for the comfort of their prospective eaters, that they will put in too much mustard or forget it altogether, insert slabs of fat without any alleviating lean, use stale bread, omit butter, and perform any and every culinary outrage in order to get the job done. How much simpler to provide a crusty loaf, some slices of veal, a piece of steak, or a wedge of beef, from which the consumer could cut pieces at his pleasure, or, simpler still, a cutlet or a chop.

Why, one wonders, is this not done? Because of the Englishwoman's fastidious distaste for the touch of meat. Food in any form she finds slightly unpleasant, and the grosser kinds—meat, for example, definitely repulsive. Therefore, so runs the unconscious argument, the fingers of nice eaters, that is to say of nice people, must be guarded from contact with the contaminating meat by the protection of the comparatively innocuous slices of bread. The fingers, but not the tongue, the palate, the gullet, the œsophagus, the stomach and the intestines. Puritanism is always capricious in its taboos, and the area of the body which it considers relevant to its fastidiousness is in this case limited to the fingers. But it is Puritanism, nevertheless, which prescribes the sandwich. On no other assumption can this repulsive but universal comestible be accounted for.

### *My Grandmother on Pigs and Women*

I have heard it said by my grandmother that in her young days, when a pig was to be killed in the country, the very greatest care had to be taken to ensure that the date of its slaughter did not coincide with the menstruation of any female of the household. The touch of the menstruating female when cutting up, preserving, pickling or otherwise manipulating the pig was regarded as a contamination of the animal's flesh, and, since the pigkiller came from a distance and

## *Women, Tastes, and Food of the English*

arranged his visits to coincide with the pigkilling needs of several farms in the neighbourhood, the date of each visit required very careful fixing indeed, alternative dates being canvassed weeks in advance by the women on the farms concerned. Times have changed; it is not the touch of women that now contaminates pigs, but of pigs in the form of ham that contaminates women. Hence the sandwich!

Symbolical of the same attitude of revulsion is the lady-like straightening out of the little finger belonging to the hand which raises to the lips a cup of tea. It is as if the body were being removed as far from the contaminating fluid as the circumstances of the case allow. Symbolical, too, is the Englishwoman's praise of 'clean kitchens' and 'clean cooking', her morbid fear of dirt in every foreign kitchen, and her dislike of French cooking on the ground of its richness and of its heterogeneity. 'I like', she says, 'to know what I am eating.'

Infuriated by this mincing Puritanism, this anæmic prudishness towards the satisfaction of the most reliable and the most punctually recurrent of the human appetites, I have often maintained that all clean cooking is dull, that all French cooking is dirty and rightly so, and that I hate to know what I am eating. No one of these statements is quite true, but each expresses a pardonable revulsion from the squeamishness of the average Englishwoman in the matter of food.

### *Re-scolding of Women*

It is this female squeamishness which, combined with the male tolerance of which I have already spoken—the English will tolerate almost any abuse, will tolerate even their wives' cooking, in order to avoid a row—is responsible for the solitary sandwich in the Refreshment Room at X—and my supper of cold beef, pickles, toast and marmalade. In case any feminine reader is tempted to resent the foregoing strictures, I should like to remind her that my scolding of Englishwomen for their domestic insufficiencies in private life began with a reflection upon the mess they have made of their chances in public life, or, more precisely, upon the fact that they have made nothing of public life at all. For, I would have her remember, I began this chapter by scolding the women attending my lectures for their failure, fully enfranchized citizens though they now are, to affect the course of history and, in particular, to arrest the world's drift to war. Women, I repeat, have made nothing of public life; yet they have

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

ceased to make what they once made of private life. I would be prepared to put up with the sandwich at X—, if women would remove the menace of war. I would be prepared to be blown up a little more cheerfully in the next war, if I were not fed on X— sandwiches during the peace. Women could abolish either the war menace or the X— sandwich, if they gave the whole of their minds to the task, if, in other words, they would make a job either of the home or of the House of Commons, either of cooking or of politics. But this generation of women, through trying to sit on two stools, seems to me to have fallen between both. They have lost their household arts without discharging their public duties.

## THE CRUELTY OF WOMEN AND SOME MEN

---

### *Rabbits and Peers*

Night after night of this lovely month of May is rendered hideous by the cries of rabbits, dogs, cats, weasels, stoats, badgers and even birds, caught in steel traps. During certain months, every night in England 200,000 rabbits caught in steel traps die in agony. The average number that perish every twenty-four hours all the year round is a hundred thousand. Thus every year thirty-six million rabbits are slowly tortured to death. In 1935 a Bill whose purpose was to prohibit the use of steel traps for catching rabbits came up for its second reading in the House of Lords. Abruptly, a large quantity of backwoodsmen peers, whom no issue of national importance had attracted to their hereditary, legislative Chamber for many years, made their appearance. In their hundreds they flocked to the House of Lords expressly to register their determination that every year in England the thirty-six million rabbits should continue to die their painful and lingering deaths. They came, in other words, to vote against Lord Tredegar's bill for abolishing the use of steel traps. Because of the action of these peers, during the twenty-four hours in which I am writing and the twenty-four hours in which you are reading these words, another hundred thousand rabbits are being caught and are dying in agony. A large proportion of those who, at this moment at which I am writing and at the moment at which you are reading, are being held in the traps have broken legs and torn flesh. Those who are lucky will already have died; the fairly lucky ones will not have been in the traps for more than twenty-four hours; the least lucky will have already been there for two days and nights.

### *Some Figures of Torment*

Nor is it only rabbits who suffer. The number of animals which are trapped by these and similar methods is, indeed, almost unbelievable.

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

In 1927 the following numbers of skins were sold in London (I am mentioning only a few of the species involved): American opossum, 2,430,746; Australian opossum, 1,677,507; white hare, 1,084,590; skunk, 1,660,161; beaver, 51,631; ermine, 213,708; red fox, 96,395; musquash, 490,558; seal, 22,866. 1927 was not in any sense an exceptional year. The vast majority of the creatures, to whose skins these statistics relate, die of starvation or else freeze to death in the steel or iron traps that hold them.

I once talked to a Canadian trapper, who told me that he made his living by the trapping of silver foxes. The area under his charge was so large that only once in three weeks was he able to make the round of the various traps which he had set. As a result, many hundreds of animals caught in his traps died of hunger. Others gnawed themselves free by biting through the imprisoned leg. Others, lacking the sense to accomplish a deliberate amputation, would writhe and twist round and round until the tendons were pulled from the shoulder, the skin worn through and the bones broken. Nearly a quarter of the traps were found to contain only a severed limb. I have not myself the literary resources to do justice to the experiences of a trapped animal. Nor, I imagine, could anybody who has not shared these experiences adequately describe them. We can only deduce them from the animals' behaviour. The following is a quotation from Dr. Coues, an experienced observer of animal life, describing the behaviour of a mink in a trap: 'One who has not taken a mink from a steel trap can scarcely form any idea of the terrible expression the animal's face assumes as the captor approaches. It has always struck me as the most nearly diabolical of anything in animal physiognomy. A sullen stare from the crouched, motionless form gives way to a new look of surprise and fear, accompanied with the most violent contortions of the body, with renewed champings of the iron, till, breathless, with heaving flanks and open mouth dribbling saliva, the animal settles again and watches with a look of concentrated hatred, mingled with impotent rage and frightful despair.'

### *Obtaining Beavers' Furs*

I permit myself one other example of man's treatment of animals, which I take from an article by E. L. Grant Watson. It describes the methods by which beavers' furs are obtained. 'The beaver, as is well known, builds dams to make artificial lakes. On the shores of these



## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

lakes he builds his lodges, with their entrances opening under the water. He is an excellent engineer and knows all about the business of dam-building, and he knows how to keep the water at just the right level so that his exit holes from the lodge are at about two feet under water. The large dams are probably of great age, and have been the property of the families in the adjacent lodges for countless generations. The weight of water in the larger ponds is very considerable, and to counter-balance the pressure on the dam the beavers have hit on a very cunning device. They build a lower dam a little below the upper one; this catches the overflow and makes a smaller pond further down stream. The water in the lower pond rises and covers the base of the upper dam, and so offers a considerable weight of water pressing against the lower side to counter-balance in part the downward pressure from the upper pond. This is a device worthy of the intelligent creatures whose object it is to keep the water in the main pond always at the rim of the dam and at the right height above the holes in the lodges. The earth at the edge of the dam is constantly liable to be displaced, and is as constantly in need of repair. Every night the beavers inspect it and make good the damage which has occurred during the day. They work in the most regular and conscientious manner, and if an artificial breach is made will repair it as soon as they are able.

'The trappers engaged in the fur trade make use of this industrious habit. They make a breach in the dam, then set their spring gins under water in the place where the beavers are likely to put their feet when they come to repair the damage. The traps are fastened to a slanting stake in such a manner that should the beaver be caught by the hind foot, and should he dive, which is his instinct, he will not be able to rise again, but will drown in his efforts to free himself. Should he be caught by a forefoot, then his heavy weight and the wrenching power he can exert is liable to break the thin bones of the wrist. By twisting round he is able to sever the skin and tear out the sinews, leaving the claws and skin of the hand in the trap, and so go free. This is the fate of hundreds of beavers trapped each year, and it affords but a small fraction of the suffering inflicted on fur-bearing animals.' One more example of man's ingenuity in beaver-trapping, and I have done. 'The trapper can find by tapping on the ice where the beaver's winter store of wood is hidden. He surrounds this with a ring of stakes, leaving one place open. He fixes a contrivance which

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

will tell him when a beaver enters through this one place. Then he sits and watches. So soon as a beaver has entered the palisade the trapper blocks the exit. The beaver, unable to return, drowns under the ices. The palisade is again opened, and the female beaver comes to see what has happened to her mate. She also is drowned in the same manner. The young beavers follow and all meet the same fate. When they are all dead, the trapper breaks the ice and collects their fur-clad bodies.<sup>1</sup>

### *Youthful Indignation and Resolve*

When I read this sort of thing I feel, as I suppose everybody else feels, both shocked and horrified. How shocking, how horrifying that men should inflict so much suffering not for need, but for profit! That, holding themselves superior to the brute creatures, they should, for the sake of women's vanity, perpetrate cruelties far exceeding those which even the most savage beasts perform in order that they may live! That priding themselves upon their sportsmanship, they should, where animals are concerned, behave like dagoes, yellow-men, outsiders, cads, rankers and members of whatever other classes are despised by the English 'sportsman' because of their imagined difference from himself, as when the trappers of beavers trade upon the creature's most creditable and endearing instincts, in order to compass its most painful destruction!

And, inevitably, the facts provoke a question. Every time a mink coat is purchased by a gentle and compassionate woman, the scene described by Dr. Coues must have been enacted. Why, then, one wants to know, are compassionate and gentle women allowed to bedeck themselves at the cost of such appalling suffering? Why, in fact, are they not told? For, of course, they have only to be told, and the worst features of the trade in fur would immediately be stopped by women's indignant refusal to wear garments obtained at the cost of such appalling suffering.

And so my horror and indignation beget resolve. I will, I say to myself, go and tell of these things to the wearers of furs and they will then cease to wear them, until such time as the trade is reformed. But I do not go and tell them. At least, I do not go and tell them now; I have learnt better.

Over and over again, during the last twenty-odd years, I have run

<sup>1</sup>From *Enigmas of Natural History*, by E. L. Grant Watson.

## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

through the gamut of feelings just recorded. Over and over again, some freshly reported atrocity has led me indignantly to expostulate with the men and women who profit by its results. It may have been the commerce in wild birds' plumes and feathers; it may have been the practice of keeping wild birds in cages, blinding them on occasion that they may sing the more sweetly, or the habit of keeping dogs for days and nights on chains, or, as in the present case, the torture of fur-bearing animals in steel traps. At first, I have been met with indignant denials; then, when I backed up my protest with statistics which permitted of no answer, with bad temper and black looks; finally, if I persisted, with violent denunciation coupled with unfavourable reflections on a cast of mind which insists on nosing out unpleasant facts and 'looking on the seamy side'. If you drag into the open the dirt which has been sedulously swept under the dining-room sideboard, and bring it to the notice of those whose business it is to remove it, they will be very angry with you, and ten to one accuse you of having made it yourself, but they will not thank you for your good offices in unearthing it, and they will not clear it away. It took me a very long time to discover this fact, but now at last I know it to be a fact and, knowing it, I know better than to make bad blood and raise ill-feeling to no good purpose.

### *Middle-aged Acquiescence tempered by Malice*

Middle age, moreover, is, I suppose, bringing its inevitable acquiescences. Let me, for example, cite the case of Mrs. X. To Mrs. X I sent the article by Grant Watson, from which I have already quoted, describing the means by which the furs which so comfort and adorn her beautiful form are acquired. Can you, I asked in effect, continue to wear them now that you *know*? When a few days later I was privileged again to meet that exquisite woman, I accosted her with the question, 'Well! What about it?' At first she affected ignorance of the subject of my question. 'What on earth', she asked, 'was I talking about.' When I enlightened her, reminding her of my letter, she was very cross with me. 'What', she wanted to know, 'did I mean by sending her such an article? Did I think that it was her fault? What did I expect her to do about it anyhow. She thought that the whole thing was in very bad taste. No, of course she could not stop wearing furs; why should she? Perhaps, if all the other women she knew did, she might think about it. But, meanwhile, what good could it pos-

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

sibly do, if she alone abstained? Anyhow, she did not believe the figures. The article, it was obvious, was written by a socialist, and socialists, as was well-known, were always stirring up trouble and trying to make decent people feel uncomfortable. She was surprised that I should have tried such tactics on her.'

Since that time Mrs. X has, broadly speaking, no longer consented to know me.

My attempt upon the virtuous complacency of Mrs. X is typical of many. Looking back over these experiences, I can affirm with a reasonable degree of conviction that in no single case have my representations produced the desired effect. The women with whom I am acquainted continue to connive at the slaughter and torture of millions of creatures, while continuing also to 'adore animals' and overfeed pet 'Poms'. I have even known a convinced vegetarienne, convinced for the reason that she could not bear to think of the dear little lambs and calves being slaughtered in order to feed her—'No! Not even with the humane killer,' she could not!—insisting, in spite of all the evidence which I brought forward to demonstrate that trapping inflicted far more and far worse pain than common or garden killing, that mink, foxes and beavers should continue to be tortured in order to keep her warm and pretty. And so, with the arrival of middle age, I have given up my well-meant, but ill-judged, attempts. I do not now endeavour to communicate to others my own horror and indignation. For the most part, nowadays, I boil alone. For the most part, but not always, since malice sometimes takes the place of benevolence, and mischievousness permits explosions which were once the expression of righteous indignation. I choose a woman, who will, I think, be incommoded by a knowledge of the facts, and I do my best to incommode her. The discomfort that I manage to produce lasts only for a very short time and never, as I have said, produces the smallest effect upon the behaviour of the discomfitee. Still, for what it is worth, it *is* discomfort, and the fact that it is experienced undoubtedly gives me gratification. The woman, of course, dislikes me for it; but then every sensible man who has reached middle age has formed his own opinion about women, and although no sensible man ever says what it is, it at least includes an indifference to their opinion about him.



## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

*People not by nature Wicked*

Now, I do not, as I hinted in the Introduction, believe that it is because people are cruel, I do not even believe that it is because they are callous, that they let these things continue. If you want to know whether a person is hard or cruel by nature, the obvious course is to examine his relations with the people whom he meets naturally and normally in his daily life. Now that people quarrel and are jealous, that they are selfish and exacting and aggressive, that they are sometimes malicious and try to do each other harm, and that they spend much of their lives in seeking to overreach one another—all this I concede. Nevertheless, they do not strike me as being predominantly cruel. Just as on the whole they tell the truth, unless they have some particular incentive to lie, so, on the whole, do they behave with kindness to other people and to animals, unless they have some particular incentive to unkindness. That they often do have such an incentive and that, as a consequence, people are frequently unkind to one another, I agree, just as I agree that, when they act together in herds and mobs, they become capable of almost any enormity through sheer disinterested wickedness. In spite of this, I hold with Socrates that, other things being equal, people have a natural tendency to pursue the good. It is natural for them, that is to say, to do good rather than evil; to be kind rather than to be unkind; to tell the truth rather than to lie. Men only lie in order to achieve some end other than the lie; but they tell the truth for its own sake. They are cruel in order to satisfy a private grudge or to avenge a real or imagined injury, but they are kind for no reason whatsoever, for no reason, that is to say, beyond the kindness. We are in fact kind, most of us, because (other things always being equal) we have a natural bias that way. Some of us, no doubt, have a natural disposition to cruelty; but they are not the majority, and they have usually been badly brought up. For these reasons, I do not regard people's professed love of animals as hypocritical. Sometimes, of course, it is hypocritical; or rather a very little love is magnified and exploited for purposes of ostentation, from excess of sentiment, from desire for effect, or out of sheer disinterested gusto. But I can see no reason to doubt that most civilized persons really do care for the comfort and happiness of the animals in their charge, and treat them as well as they can, provided that they are not themselves put to any inconvenience and expense in doing so.



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

### *How to deal with Motorists*

I conclude that the continuance of the fur trade is not due either to cruelty or to callousness. To what, then? To a terrifying lack of imagination. Most people are affected only by those events which take place in the same territorial area as that in which they happen to be living. Furthermore, the effect produced is very much more intense, if the event happens to have been perceived by one or other of the five senses.

Consider, for example, the methods recently adopted in the United States for dealing with 'speeding' motorists. It appears that in America the devotion of human energy to rapidly altering the position in space of pieces of matter is even more whole-hearted than it is in Europe. Nobody in America seems to mind very much what the places to which he travels are like—not unnaturally, since an American city is like nothing at all but another American city, which it so exactly resembles, that it is often almost impossible to tell one from another—but he does mind intensely that he should travel to them with great rapidity. So great is the devotion of Americans to the idea of speed, that they do not scruple to kill in its pursuit thirty-six thousand persons a year, and to wound and mutilate just under a million. With the object of diminishing this appalling casualty list, magistrates, police chiefs and executives and authorities generally have hitherto mainly relied upon two methods, the method of punishment and the method of moral exhortation. Both have proved unsuccessful. Fines make little impression on the rich and nobody likes imprisoning a motorist. Besides, once communities began to imprison their motorists, there would be no accommodation left in their prisons. As to moral exhortation, my private belief is that this has never produced upon human beings an effect even remotely approximating to that with which it has been credited. For two thousand years, from thousands of pulpits, human beings have been exhorted by hundreds of thousands of clergymen to be unselfish, meek and kindly, not to resist aggression, and to respond to evil not with a contrary evil, but with good, with the result that their conduct in ethical matters, whether they happen to be living in West End mansions or East End tenements, is broadly indistinguishable from that of the inhabitants of fifth-century Athens to whom no such exhortation had ever been addressed.

Recently, therefore, the American authorities have taken to other

## The Cruelty of Women and Some Men

methods. A pamphlet called *Sudden Death* has been published giving particulars of the effects of motor accidents. The pamphlet, which has reached a circulation of two million, consists of a series of detailed descriptions of precisely what a motor accident involves. Its pages tell of broken limbs, trailing viscera and oozing brains. The reader is spared no detail of sickening horror. The pamphlet has evoked a host of newspaper articles on the same lines. Meanwhile, the police have taken the hint and shepherd droves of guilty motorists round the Morgues in which the victims of motor accidents are laid out. When the nerves of the guilty have been adequately shaken, they are made to copy out ten times passages from J. C. Furnas's essay entitled *Better Off Dead*. For example:

'He was doubled up like a broken stick and thrust half-way through the narrow back window of the wreck, his head between his knees. They didn't dare try to unbend him till they reached the hospital. He was still alive and conscious. He proved that by stealing the policeman's gun out of its holster and trying to shoot himself while he still had the chance. He knew his back was broken and he'd better die at once before they did anything about it.'

The nineteenth-century Puritans terrified men into virtue by painting lurid and detailed pictures of the torments of hell. Listen, for example, to the great Dr. Spurgeon telling us with infinite relish in his book of sermons, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, exactly what will happen to us, if we do not pay attention to what the good God, as interpreted by Dr. Spurgeon, tells us: 'When thou diest, thy *soul* will be tormented alone: that will be a hell for it; but at the Day of Judgement thy *body* will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin hells, thy soul sweating drops of blood, and thy body suffused with agony. In fire exactly like that which we have on earth, thy body will be, asbestos-like, for ever consumed, all thy veins roads for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament.' The invention of asbestos must have been a great aid to the nineteenth-century imagination, and conferred upon nineteenth-century divines engaged in devising torments a considerable advantage over their medieval predecessors.

The twentieth century has been forced to adopt Spurgeon's methods in order to terrify men into carefulness. Nobody, it is urged, can realize what the bare statistics of slaughter on the roads mean,

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

unless he has been shown the ghastly spectacle of mutilated humanity lying in a Morgue, has seen photographs of those whose faces have been smashed, has talked to young men and girls who are doomed to spend a lifetime on beds of pain from which they will never rise. The results are said to be admirable. A record is kept of the subsequent history of the motorists who have been subjected to this treatment. There are no further offences. . . .

### *Unimagination and War*

I am not surprised. I would like to extend the application of the method to a campaign against war. It is said that the war films and war books which appeared in the late nineteen-twenties, horrible as they were, did not in fact deter the young from wishing to participate in war. On the contrary, they encouraged war-like spirit, inciting the sons to show their mettle by undergoing the hardships which their father endured.

Possibly! Possibly not! But if, indeed, they did have the effect alleged, the remedy is simple. The war-films and the books were not horrible enough, and the horrors were not perpetrated upon the right people. Let there be shown to young men pictures of their mothers, sweethearts, sisters and wives, spitting up pieces of poisoned lung in the last agonies of asphyxiation, being blinded by liquid fire, or flayed alive by mustard-gas. Their enthusiasm for war would, I cannot help thinking, be damped.

In no single respect is men's lack of imagination more lamentably displayed than in the indifference they exhibit to preparations for war. I am, we will suppose, at the cinema. The news-reel provides the usual set of variations on the theme of efficient killing. I see troops manoeuvring, guns firing, submarines diving, aeroplanes dropping bombs which fall upon buildings and blow them literally to smithereens. Meanwhile the honeyed voice of the commentator is heard: 'If we must be bombed, and it seems we must, we may as well be bombed by an up-to-date machine'. Nobody applauds, nobody hisses, nobody shows either elation or horror. The audience just sits.

In H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* there is an account of the future destruction of the penguins. As the guns mowed lines of dead through the serried ranks of birds standing on the beach, observers noted with interest that the survivors showed no signs either of fright or resistance. With a mild unsuspecting curiosity,

## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

they watched the preparations for their own destruction, watched the slaughter of their fellows, went on watching until their own end came. Foolish, imbecile birds, defective in intelligence! Certainly! But what of the human penguins who in the third decade of the twentieth century, watch with equal equanimity the preparations for their own destruction, hurrying in their sleek thousands to see battleships launched, to rejoice over reviews and parades, to watch army aeroplanes stunting in the sky, to applaud pictures of artillery and bombing practice on the news-reel, to subscribe to the shares of armament firms. . . . ?

Are people mad that they sit so indifferently, applauding so casually, enjoying so cheerfully these terrible displays, or does it never occur to them, as they gape at the guns, that the instruments of destruction in whose efficiency they take pleasure may one day be turned against themselves? Human imagination, the fact is, alas, all too obvious, is sadly deficient. Dominated by temporal and spatial limitations, it can be stirred only by happenings immediately contiguous to the position of its owner in space and time.

### *Unimagination in Women*

But—and here I come to my moral—the size of the spatial and temporal area which a person is prepared to consider relevant to the scope of his interests is, on the whole, proportional to the degree of that person's intelligence. In the case of the very stupid, the area is small. As intelligence grows and is supplemented by knowledge, the area extends. A perfectly humane man may be defined as one who considers all suffering equally important and equally regrettable, wherever and to whomsoever it may happen to occur. In the light of this definition, I would hazard the opinion that, to be humane, requires a good native intelligence which has been developed by education. Take, for example, the case of women. Everybody knows the English lady who, with pieces of stone and fragments of glass nailed into the lobes of her ears, feels no sense of incongruity when financing missionaries to persuade savage women not to put rings through their noses; or who looks with pitying contempt on Chinese women who compress their feet longitudinally, the while, with feet latitudinally compressed, she unstably balances herself on the little wooden pegs known as heels. She has, it is obvious, no imagination. She cannot, that is to say, see the connection between the mutilation and



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

distortion of her own body and the mutilation and distortion which she deprecates in the bodies of others.

It is women who make much of funerals. They bury dear Annie with pomp and circumstance. If they are Christians—and most of those I know profess the Christian religion, never having had the imagination to conceive of any other—they should know that Annie is not here in this unappetizing lump of decaying meat, but is elsewhere, leading a purer and happier existence than ever she did in the flesh. If, on the other hand, they are materialists, they will know that Annie is nowhere at all. Why, then, honour the lump of decaying meat? Even if the resurrection of the body is believed in, it is not *this* that will arise, for *this* will shortly be metamorphosed out of all recognition, becoming in due course widely diffused through worms, and soil, and grass, and cattle, and other human beings, so that *its* resurrection would be a matter of the greatest difficulty and disturbance, entailing, incidentally, the disruption of a great many other people and things. No, it is not this body which will arise, but a grand new one that God will fashion in dear Annie's image specially for the occasion. It is no doubt right and proper that grief for dear Annie's death should provoke a ritual of some kind, but why make the lump of decaying matter the centre of it, unless we believe that dear Annie still is, or at least is still connected with, the lump? And, contrary as it is to the teaching of their religion, it is precisely this belief that, I imagine, women instinctively hold. Officially, they maintain, or would maintain, if challenged, that the spirit is other than the flesh and leaves the flesh at death. In fact, they are incapable of the imaginative effort demanded by the official belief and continue to revere the flesh. Women, in short, are without imagination; they cannot see that there is no connection between the immortal soul, which they wish to honour, and the decaying matter which with such lavish and elaborate ritual they insist on honouring.

Similarly with pain! We all know the compassionate lady who dissolves in pity over the child who has cut his finger, caught a cold, or bruised his elbow, yet remains totally unmoved by the announcement in the morning paper that three hundred thousand people have died of famine in China; who receives with apathetic indifference the news that a pacifist has been flogged to death in a German concentration camp, while devotedly applying poultices to her husband's aching ear or tooth; and who swaddles herself in the skins of tor-



## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

tured seals and foxes, the while she cossets her pet Pekinese and declares her inability to tolerate the shooting of an aged horse, or the drowning of an unwanted kitten. These women who connive at the horrors of the fur trade are not hardhearted; they are, indeed, full of pity. It is not because they are cruel, but because they are without imagination, because they cannot see the connection between their personal adornment and the pain of which it is the cause, that they still permit themselves to go clothed in the skins of other animals for which such a terrible price in suffering has been paid.

### *The Definition of Rationality*

To return to my moral; I believe that intelligence makes for humanity simply because it extends the area over which we are prepared to consider happenings as relevant to our concern. A scale of measurement might be constructed for the purpose of grading living organisms by reference to their ability to be moved by events which do not affect them personally. At one end of the scale would be the animal, concerned only with his immediate environment. After the animal would come the savage, then the lady petting her Peke in furs obtained by torture, then the ordinary man who is genuinely, if fitfully, concerned about cruelty when he chances to hear of it, and finally the sage. The creature highest on the scale would be also the most rational. The sages and religious teachers of the world have unanimously stressed the importance of kindness; but even more strongly they have insisted that kindness should be impartial. *All men*, they have told us, are our brothers; not *some*, but *all*.

'Inasmuch', in fact, 'as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

But the great religious teachers were not content to limit the range of their sympathy to their fellow men. They regarded the animal no less than the human creation as having claims upon the compassion of the enlightened man. Christ tells us of God's interest in the sparrows: St. Francis feeds the birds: Asoka established medical dispensaries for animals. It is no accident that the Indian Gurus are vegetarians.

### *Relation of Reason to Intuition*

Now I maintain that what is revealed to the most advanced representatives of our species, the sages and seers and mystics, as an im-

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

mediate conviction of self-evident truth, can be learned by the ordinary processes of intellectual training and discipline, until it comes to form part of the mental stock in trade of common men and women. How, asked Plato, does the mind of man achieve a vision of the Form of Beauty, and answered, by long training in those sciences which require exactness and precision. The training of intelligence is no substitute for insight, but it prepares the way for it. The testimony of the mystics on this point is unanimous. Continually, they insist that the experience by which they are enthralled visits them only after a long period of preparation, entailing the discipline of the mind no less than that of the body.

The manner of my own enjoyment of painting points the same moral. To enjoy the work of a great painter is, in however small a degree, to share his insight. If I am to do this, I must go, as it were, into æsthetic training. By nature obtuse to the beauty of visual art, I cannot, or rather I could not, unaided, enjoy Cézanne. But if somebody will take me, as it were, by the æsthetic hand pointing out the beauties that, to my unaccustomed eye, are concealed by the strangeness of the medium, set me reading books which describe the aims and methods of the Impressionists, and then induce me to strike, while the iron of my instruction is still hot, by paying a number of visits to the same set of Cézanne pictures, then I shall, then in fact I do, begin to see dimly for myself what Cézanne first saw unaided and what others, by the help of the insight embodied in his pictures, see easily and clearly for themselves. As with the pictures of Cézanne, so with the works of art which I learnt to enjoy at the Chinese Art Exhibition, of which I shall speak in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup>

As with æsthetic insight, so also with moral. Reason is no substitute for intuition, but it can check its deliverances and, if it endorses them, engender a desire for the conduct which they prescribe. It does not admittedly evoke a crusading enthusiasm on behalf of the ends whose value the intuition of others has revealed to it, nor does it generate the necessary resolution to pursue, in the face of difficulty or persecution, conduct which is seen to be right, but it does, other things being equal, elevate its possessor to a level of moral insight superior to that which is embodied in the conventional standards of the time. On the whole the standards recognized by the man of trained mind are higher than those of ordinary people. Admittedly

<sup>1</sup> See Part V, Chapter XV.

## *The Cruelty of Women and Some Men*

he rarely lives up to them; admittedly he has little power to impose, little zeal to urge them upon others. Nevertheless, the fact that they are recognized is a good, and it is not always that the recognition is without effect. The cultivation of the mind does not, I repeat, lead to vigorous action on behalf of that which the enlightened intelligence sees to be good. Intellectuals, in other words, are not zealots. But it does safeguard the cultivated mind from the ready performance of things which are evil. Intellectuals, in fact, are reasonably harmless and gentle, and being one of them myself, I now propose to praise them.

Taking them by and large, the intellectuals I have known do less harm in the world, even if they do not do much more good, than an equal number of random 'men in the street'. This superior abstention from evil on the part of intellectuals is not due to some innate store of kindness or good-heartedness superior to that possessed by the average of their fellows, but is, if I am right, the result of the cultivation of the reason and the consequent enlargement of the boundaries of the imagination. The enlargement of the imagination affects conduct in two ways. In the first place, it makes men more sensitive to suffering in others. It is difficult, for example, to conceive of an intellectual sitting by cheerfully drinking while a man is being slowly flogged into insensibility before his eyes, a common occurrence, apparently, in the Brown Houses of Germany in the early days of the Nazi Revolution. In the second place, it enlarges the area over which the sympathy of the cultivated man operates. It is to the tendency of intellectuals to protest against wrong and suffering, wherever they are to be found, that their notorious addiction to movements and causes is due. It is because of this addiction that intellectuals are so often called cranks, a crank being a person who protests against what non-cranks take for granted, and so makes non-cranks feel uncomfortable. It is the intellectuals who protest against the trade in feathers, who organize petitions against steel traps, who object to displays by performing animals, who denounce the fur trade. Such women as I know who refuse to wear furs and sables are not perhaps more tender-hearted than the general run of their sex, but they are definitely more intelligent. Thus it is that the intellectual comes to be known as the 'universal protester', as the 'supporter of lost causes', as the 'friend of every country but his own', or as a 'Mr. Nosey Parker', because being more sensitive to, and concerned about, the

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

suffering and misery of mankind than his more stupid but equally kindly fellows, he is continually joining movements for the suppression of the cruelty and the wrong which outrage *him*, but leave *them* untouched.

### *Precariousness of Rational Humanitarianism*

But the attitude of rational humanitarianism which considers all suffering, wherever it may occur, equally relevant to its compassion is, like all the more recently evolved human attributes, achieved with difficulty and precariously maintained. Let life become uncertain or insecure, and it drops away with the most alarming rapidity. Thus ethically-minded vegetarians who, in the early summer of 1914, avoided butchers' shops and turned pale at the sight of blood, could be seen a few months later sticking bayonets into the stomachs of other men without turning a hair. Callousness is the child of custom and grows with what it feeds on. Sportsmen who hunt and shoot, identifying the good life with depriving other creatures of life, are often kindly men and great lovers of animals, yet they are also the most whole-hearted advocates of corporal and capital punishment. On the other hand, while it is true that many scholars have been blackguards, I would sooner trust myself to the mercies of the cultivated man whose life has been spent in the world of books, than to the genial heartiness of the Philistine.

I conclude that in this matter as in so many others, it is in the cultivation of intelligence that the hope of civilization lies. It is more fruitful to clear men's heads than to warm their hearts; more fruitful and also more practicable, for while the recipe for warming hearts is not known, education has at least achieved some success in the matter of clearing heads.

## THE LUNACY OF MY CONTEMPORARIES

*Non-Protection Against Gas*

I have been reading a Home Office circular containing instructions for the defence of the civilian population in the event of a raid by a hostile air force. The methods of defence reduce themselves to two—gas masks and bomb-proof shelters. Gas masks, however, are, it appears, largely useless and for three reasons. First there are new gases which, when brought into contact with the mask, cause it to give forth a gaseous emanation which is poisonous to the person inhaling it. This emanation, it appears, is liable to occur whatever the material of which the mask is made. Secondly, there are gases which do not have to be inhaled in order to produce their effect; it is sufficient that they should come into contact with skin or with the clothing. Now it is not suggested that the whole body can be insulated. Thirdly, there are now, it seems, gases which lie about—sometimes in liquid form—for many hours after the bombs which distribute them have been dropped. The gassed area needs, in fact, to be carefully disinfected before it is safe for people to enter it, and the disinfection is a lengthy process. Now nobody maintains that gas masks can be kept on for twenty-four hours or more. Sooner or later one takes off the mask, and then, presumably, one dies—painfully, as anybody who will take the trouble to read the pamphlet issued by the Union of Democratic Control, entitled *POISON GAS*, will realize. As to bomb-proof shelters, these no doubt would be effective, but it seems unlikely that nearly enough of them could be constructed or excavated to house forty-odd million people, still more unlikely that the forty-odd million people, or any proportion of the forty-odd million people, however minute, could live there. By what means would they be fed? Whence would they get their water? How would they dispose of their sewage? The position in fact, still seems to be, as stated in Mr. Baldwin's famous speech: 'I think it is as well also for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth that can prevent him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

him, the bomber will always get through. The only defence is in offence, which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy, if you wish to save yourselves.' In the present state of the world the chances seem to be considerably higher than fifty per cent that the majority of the European population under fifty will not die in their beds; the chances also seem to be that their deaths will be exceedingly painful. Is the Home Office ignorant of these facts? Presumably it is not; in fact, it certainly is not. It must know that the precautions that it advocates will not really protect the population. Why then, does the Home Office issue its circular? The object presumably is to give people a sense of security. The precautions, admittedly, will not protect people, but they may give them the illusion that they will be protected. The point is important, not only because the next war will be the first in which the capital cities of the belligerent countries will take the place of the front line trenches, but because the fact that they will do so has become more or less common knowledge.

### *The Importance of Civilian Morale*

Knowing this, the common people who live in the capital cities are desirous of peace and show more concern at the prospects of war, more reluctance to enter into it than ever before. (One might, indeed, have expected that knowledge of the facts would produce the same reluctance in Governments, and for the same reason, but a moment's reflection suggests that the Governments can and will leave the capital cities. The French Government, it will be remembered, made arrangements in the last war for a move to Bordeaux.) Now the belief that they will be protected causes ordinary people to feel less hostile to the idea of England's engaging in a war than they otherwise might do. It is not necessary that ordinary people should desire war. They do not; but it is important that they should be induced to endorse policies, such as that of insuring against war by devoting all one's savings to the piling up of explosives, which sooner or later will lead to war. Provided that they personally will be protected, the loss of hundreds of thousands of other people's lives seems to those who have been brought to a right frame of mind by Government propaganda to be a not extraordinary price to pay for honour, prestige, national greatness and economic development. The illusion of protection will also conduce to civilian morale. When the bombs begin

## *The Lunacy of My Contemporaries*

to fall, and people watch the skins of their wives and children peeling off under the influence of mustard gas, while they themselves are coughing out their lungs in the last stages of asphyxiation by chlorine, there is likely to be a certain irritation with the Government; there is even likely to be panic; but the panic will not begin until *after* the bombs have fallen. Even after the bombs have begun to fall, peoples possessing high civilian morale will abstain from lynching their Governments in order to put a stop to their misery, for a longer time than peoples with low civilian morale. The existence of morale *before* the bombs began to fall is of considerable value for two reasons. First, the knowledge that people's morale is good makes it easier for Governments to pursue aggressive policies, since they believe that these will be supported by citizens, even if they seem likely to involve the country in war. Secondly, the sufferers in the *first* raid will be more inclined to die quietly than they would do, if their morale were bad. Now the ability to die quietly, is considered to be a virtue in peoples.

### *The Spell of Words and Phrases*

In God's name, why? Are people mad that they should go a-whoring after these abstractions; that they should be prepared to suffer indescribably painful deaths for the sake of words and phrases; that they should prefer not only to their own lives, but to the lives and happiness of those they love, such figments as 'national prestige', 'sacred missions', 'rights of expansion' and 'civilizing destinies'? As if nations were anything at all apart from the people who compose them, or could possess destinies and missions other than those of individual men and women. Man—it is his greatest tragedy—has always worshipped figments. But the primitives at least bowed down before concrete images, idols of wood and stone; they killed and mutilated and tortured in the service of a visible something. Modern man has advanced: he has eliminated visible idols and sacrifices to abstractions; he immolates himself upon the altars of concepts, which mean—nothing at all.

Why do we do these things? In part, because we mistake words and phrases for realities. I frequently have occasion to travel from Oxford to London. Normally I contrive to get a fast train, but there are times when a slow, stopping train turns me out at Reading Station to wait there for twenty minutes before another slow train

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

takes me on to London. Reading Station is not an ideal milieu for waiters; no Great Western Railway station is beautiful, but the station at Reading, like the town it serves, is a monument of ugliness, a typical product of the age which engendered it. It is also cold, draughty and inadequately provided with seats and waiting-rooms. As I was disconsolately pacing the platform, there came thundering into the station the magnificent Cornish Riviera Express, non-stop from Plymouth to Paddington, but on this occasion, for some reason known only to the Company, slowing down and drawing up at Reading platform. Inevitably, the thought presented itself—'Why not? The Cornish Riviera Express will take you to London much faster than your slow train. Why it is stopping here, God knows! But clearly it has not stopped for nothing; possibly it has stopped for you!' So I proceeded to board the train, at least I was in the act of boarding it, when there came puffing along the platform a small, round, pompous, self-important guard. 'You can't get in here, sir, the train doesn't stop.' To which I replied with, I hope, commendable presence of mind, 'That's all right. I see that it does not stop, and I am not in it.'

Words and phrases are taken for reality so obviously that, when the cruder examples of the mistake are brought to his notice the reader permits himself an indulgent laugh. But now let us suppose that we go in search of the same mistake elsewhere. I take up my daily paper in the reasonable certainty that I shall find in the utterance of some leader of opinion an illustration of my theme no less apposite than that of the railway guard. And here it is!

### *The Alleged Virtue of Being Many*

It is the meeting of the British Medical Association at Melbourne, and Queensland's Director General of Health has been commenting lugubriously upon the fall of the birth-rate. 'Here, in Australia,' he continued, 'our moonlight civilization mirrors the decline in birth-rate, while the population sinks in western Europe most alarmingly. For these things act here not as a safeguard, but towards disaster. We cannot preserve our frontiers unless we can effectively occupy the land we claim.' Waiving consideration of the circularity of the argument which assertions of this kind entail—a nation must have a high birth-rate. Why? Because it must be strong. Why must it be strong? Because it must be able to protect itself in the event of war.

## *The Lunacy of My Contemporaries*

Why, then, should it fear war? Because the pressure of expanding populations resulting from a high birth-rate inevitably leads to war,—I want to draw attention to the extraordinary assumptions upon which it is based. Every phrase begs its own particular question.

Why, for example, is Australian civilization called 'moonlight'? Because its members decline in number. Is quantity of life, then, a good in itself? Clearly in the existing state of the world it is not. Teeming populations are a menace to peace and are encouraged, though without much success, by European dictators to teem just because they are a menace to peace. But if quality of life is desired, why is it assumed that few people are less likely to reach a high state of civilization than many? How many were there, for example, in ancient Athens, or are there in modern Denmark? From what disaster, then, are men safeguarded by an inflated population? The answer given in the case of Australia is 'from the loss of their frontiers'. But why not lose frontiers? Why is the political ownership of sparsely populated and frequently barren territories a good? Why, when the very fact of the existence of such territories is a standing incitement to nations with swelling populations, is it not an unmitigated evil? Since it is from Australia that this phrase about the preservation of frontiers has reached us, let us consider the position of Australia *vis-à-vis* that of Japan.

### *Australians and Japanese*

Australia is a continent. Its area is just under three million square miles. It contains 6,350,000 white people. The white population has not sensibly increased since the war. Rather less than half the total area of Australia is tropical; this half is practically empty of whites, the whole white population of this area of 1,149,320 square miles being 185,000. In Queensland, which is sometimes cited as a testimony to the adaptability of the whites, and as a proof that they will ultimately colonize the whole of Australia, there are fewer whites to-day than there were forty years ago. Most of Australia is empty for the simple reason that in most of Australia white men cannot live. Will they, then, permit others to live there who can live there? They will not.

Just across the Pacific is Japan, a country consisting of a group of smallish islands. In Japan the density of population is estimated at 404 per square mile. The natural resources of Japan are not great,



## *He Scolds the Civilized*

and it is only by intensive cultivation of the soil and the importation of considerable quantities of food that the Japanese are able to maintain their present very low standard of living. The population expands at the rate of three-quarters of a million a year, and there seems to be little hope of adding to the area which can be profitably tilled. The Japanese are, in fact, going through the swarming period, which appears to occur sooner or later in the lives of all nations. Now the Japanese can live in hot climates, much hotter than those which whites can tolerate. Also, as their experiment in Manchuria has convincingly demonstrated, they cannot live in cold ones. From forty to sixty million of them could easily be accommodated in Australia, not only without impinging upon the parts which the whites actually do occupy, but without impinging upon the parts which, by any conceivable possibility, they might wish to occupy. Why then, do they not go there? Because of the 'dog in the manger' attitude of the Australians, combined with the nationalist pride of the Japanese.

The Japanese are unwilling that any part of their people should be lost to them and incorporated in the political being of another state.

The Australians by stringent immigration laws seek to prevent the immigration, not only of the yellow races, but even of other white races. Only members of the Anglo-Saxon race and those of good farming stock are permitted to enter. If the present situation persists, the only logical outcome is war, since one nation cannot be expected for ever to tolerate the holding by another of enormous tracts of the earth's surface which it is unwilling or unable to populate, while its own people are stifling in a welter of overcrowding and economically cutting one another's throats in a competitive struggle for livelihood which grows yearly more intense. The British bulldog, in short, cannot continue indefinitely to be a dog in the manger. Why, one wonders, are not arrangements made for the peaceful partition of Australia, one part being conceded to Japan, and earmarked for an exclusively Japanese population, the rest being reserved for whites? Because states must, at all costs, 'preserve their frontiers'. Why must they? There are, so far as I can see, no reasons at all, except the intangible reason of pride and privilege.

### *The Preservation of Frontiers*

In order that states may preserve their territories undiminished,



## The Lunacy of My Contemporaries

they are, it seems, prepared to fly in the face of justice and common sense by denying to other states the things of which they stand in urgent and manifest need. What is more, they are prepared, in the last resort to back their denial by force. In other words, they are prepared to inflict terror and pain and death upon thousands of human beings, in order that 'frontiers may be preserved'. Queensland's Director-General of Health tells us that the preservation of frontiers may also be achieved by increasing the white population of Australia, and, accordingly, advocates a high birth-rate. His advice, if taken, may well prove to have the contrary result, since an increase in the number of white babies would lend countenance to the suggestion that the whites may ultimately be able to populate Australia, strengthen the opposition to coloured immigration, and make it harder than it now is to secure by peaceful means a modification of existing frontiers in the interests of a less inequitable distribution of the world's territories. Thus, in the hope of 'preserving frontiers' the Medical Officer of Health is led to advocate the very policy which will make their ultimate surrender more likely.

The spirit of Queensland's Medical Officer informs the attitude of our governing classes to all their possessions. The soil of the Empire is, it seems, hallowed. Let there be a *nuance* of a *soupcçon* of a hint of an intimation of a suggestion that a square inch of sand in the most arid of all the infertile spots upon which 'the sun that never sets' swelters, be handed over to the League of Nations or transformed from being a possession into being a mandated territory, and Blimps burst in their baths while the whole Press of the 'right' is empurpled with indignation. As I write, the Bishop of Birmingham has in a sermon made the very sensible suggestion that the Crown Colonies might be handed over to the League, in order, however slightly, to redress the present disproportionate distribution of the undeveloped territories of the earth. The suggestion is eminently reasonable; yet it strikes the average governing class mind as being so remote from reality, as to be not even wicked but preposterous, so preposterous indeed, as to be almost funny. Thus Mr. A. Duff Cooper, Secretary of State for War, after roundly criticizing the Bishop for interfering in politics, is reported to have said: 'It is remarkable that such a distinguished clergyman should make such a ludicrous suggestion in a pulpit to an educated audience who must have been laughing at him while he was preaching.' I wonder why Mr. Duff Cooper finds

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

it ludicrous to try to diminish the all too numerous potential causes of the next war.

'*More Horrible than War*'. The Bishop of Birmingham has an exceptional nose for reality, unlike most of the clergymen of the Established Church who are adepts at giving us phrases instead. 'There are things in men's lives in peaceful England to-day which are far more horrible than a good, clean war.' It is a Senior Chaplain speaking, and he is preaching to the Old Contemptibles in Salisbury Cathedral. The last war has been variously described. The best description that I know is 'a grim, ghastly reality of flesh and misery and butchery and dirt and mud and lice and mangled bodies, of reckless courage, of beastly cruelty.' Men gouged out one another's eyes, dug out the living contents of other men's stomachs, threw other men into furnaces, cut off the breasts of women; also men hung upon barbed wire for hours, sometimes for days, with their intestines trailing round them, praying for a bullet or a shell to put them out of their torture; also, in considerable numbers they went mad.

Now what, I wonder, in men's lives could be more horrible than these things. I wish that the Chaplain could have brought himself to tell us. No doubt it is true that even in ordinary times men torture, kill, flog and betray one another; that even in ordinary times they rape women, and that in a thousand ways they inflict pain and suffering upon other men. But all these things they did in the war and they did them on an unprecedented scale. What is more, they were officially authorized to do them. As a result, eleven million of them were killed, twenty million of them permanently mutilated, while the number of wounded was uncounted. As for common or garden vices, greed, treachery, lying, vulgarity, wantonness and sheer unabashed silliness, these had the time of their lives. But I dare say that the Chaplain intends something quite different from what I suppose by the word 'horrible'. I have just read in Gibbon the account of the trial of an early Pope, entitled John XXIII. It contains the following passage: 'The vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy and incest; the most scandalous charges were suppressed.' The most scandalous charges, I suppose, were those of heresy. The Pope, I imagine, had been guilty of professing a belief which diverged in some slight respect from some commonly accepted dogma. By the same standard, I suppose that 'the things in men's lives more horrible', are nothing more nor less

## *The Lunacy of My Contemporaries*

than a failure to share the Chaplain's views in regard to the supernatural government of the universe.

The phrase 'a good, clean war' I again find difficult. A 'bad war' I could understand, but 'good'? 'clean'? I quote from a book which I happen to be reading at the moment, *The Golden Horn*, by F. Yeats Brown, who certainly cannot be numbered in general among the disparagers of war. He is speaking of the treatment of the Bulgarians by the Serbs: 'A lieutenant of artillery had been found disembowelled, with a barley-sheaf stuffed into his abdomen; a soldier had had his eyes gouged out and military buttons put in their place; a peasant had had his ears bitten off; a baby was cooked alive; and a cavalry man was discovered scalped, with parts of his body cut off and thrust into his mouth.' Now all this I suppose may be safely dismissed as 'unclean' without endangering the Canon's thesis, for what after all can one expect from Serbs and Bulgars? Wars fought by such peoples are, it is obvious, bound to be 'unclean'. But does the Chaplain believe that the behaviour of any people at war is different, or that there is some special virtue in some men—about Englishmen, I suppose he would say—that makes them incapable of such actions as Yeats Brown describes? I have a friend who was an officer on a British ship during the war. He told me how one day they captured a German submarine which was believed to have been particularly successful in sinking British merchant vessels. The Captain and the crew of the submarine were brought on board and consigned to the guard-room, while my friend and the other officers went to lunch. Late in the afternoon they sent for the captured Germans, but none appeared, and on going to the guard-room they found it empty. Where, then, were the men? Enquiry revealed that the whole of the submarine's crew had been flung living into the ship's furnace. Now I cannot see why my friend should have invented this story.

Oh, Chaplain, wicked as it may be to disagree with you about the nature of the supernatural government of the universe, I cannot believe that such disagreement is a thing more horrible than 'a good, clean war'. And what consolation is it to a man whose lungs are being slowly eaten away by poison gas as he watches the woman he loves choking in torment, to reflect that his and her sufferings are being endured in what the Chaplain calls 'a good clean war'?

For there are no 'good, clean wars'; I doubt if there ever were such things, but, if there were, they are clean no longer. A 'good, clean

## *He Scolds the Civilized*

war' must, I suppose, be conceived as a war of the old kind, when men fought one another with battle-axes, swords, bayonets and muskets. But, even if there is some mysterious cleanliness in having your bowels pierced by a blade of steel or your bladder shattered by a piece of metal, I doubt if even the Chaplain would find cleanliness in the poisonous infection of the blood by a microbe, or the retching and vomiting produced by a whiff of phosgene. Phosgene, by the way, has a delayed effect; you have a whiff, cough, are sick, and then, apparently, in about an hour's time, you are all right. But in four and a half hours 'the patient became blue-ish about the lips. Coughing then recommenced with the expectoration of frothy sputum. Soon the lips and face became of a grey, ashen colour, though the pulse remained fairly strong. About four pints of clear, frothy, yellowish liquid were coughed up from the lungs in the next hour and a quarter, and at the end of this time the patient expired.'<sup>1</sup> Very clean indeed!

### *The Bewitchment of the Simple*

As with the 'preservation of frontiers' and 'good clean wars', so with a score of phrases by which men in the modern world are bewitched and bemused. Aryans and non-Aryans, Communists, Pacifists, Jews, Fascists—by such labels do men seek to disguise from each other their common humanity.

'Our world-wide Empire', 'Our Imperial Ascendancy', 'The Love of Country', 'Our Glorious Traditions', 'The Virility of the Race', 'The Honour of the Flag', 'Hearth and Home', 'The Anglo-Saxon Mission' are phrases harmless enough in themselves.

They even stand for a certain sort of ideal, the ideal of loyalty, of service, of comradeship, and courage. Ideals such as these have power over a certain sort of mind which, albeit insensitive to the finer values, is capable of possessing a certain nobility, the nobility of the second class in Plato's State.

It is when these harmless phrases, these far from contemptible ideals are used to lead simple people to their destruction, that one is entitled to protest. And not only simple people, for it is characteristic of the simple mind, especially when it is agitated by emotion, to insist that everybody should share its emotion. Intolerant of difference, it requires everybody to feel as it feels, to value as it values, and

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of the Medical Aspects of Chemical Warfare*, published by H.M. Stationery Office, 1926, p. 41.



## *The Lunacy of My Contemporaries*

to think as it thinks, or, at any rate, it requires that the bodies of all people in its neighbourhood should behave as if they felt, valued and thought as it feels, values and thinks. Consequently, those of us who do not share the emotions of the herd in war-time are persecuted, imprisoned, and in extreme cases, shot. In the next war there will be so many of us that, I suppose, we shall have to be shot. But even if the herd would tolerate our non-participation in its determination to mutilate, burn, poison and disembowel the members of other herds, there is, I am afraid, no escape for any of us.

### *The Responsibility of the Machine*

'God sends his rain equally upon the just and unjust.' No doubt! But it is the just who get rheumatism, since the unjust steal the justs' umbrellas. Once more I come back to my enemy, the machine. For it is the machine which has made the men of blood so dangerous to the men of peace. In the old days the men of blood fought their wars and the men of peace stayed quietly at home; but science and the machines, between them, have ensured that there will never be any staying quietly at home any more. In the next war the bombs, like the rain, will fall equally upon the warmonger and the pacifist, upon the believer in human suffering and the believer in human happiness. But it is the pacifist who will be the easiest target, since the fighting man will consider himself entitled to monopolize the bomb-proof shelters because of his greater importance to the nation. Or he will, himself, be busy bombing. In the next war the soldier hero will be the man who goes to gas the women and children of the enemy, while leaving his own to be gassed in his absence.

I have already recommended the abolition of the car because of its offence against Beauty. Let me now recommend the abolition of the aeroplane because of its offence against 'Goodness'. The aeroplane does not make men stupider and wickeder than they were formerly, but it does make their stupidity and wickedness infinitely more destructive. 'If men were all virtuous, I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly, but what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds, neither walls nor mountains, nor seas could afford security.' The quotation is from *Rasselas*, written by Dr. Johnson in 1759. How sincerely, as always, do I agree with Dr. Johnson.



Part Five

THE AUTHOR IS MOVED BY AND  
REFLECTS UPON BEAUTY

---

14

A BATCH OF BEAUTIES

---

I. CHRISTIANS INTO MOTORISTS

*View from Burton Down*

It has been a lovely October day, one of the loveliest of the autumn. In the morning I rode along the Downs westward from Whiteways above Arundel, passing through Houghton Forest where in July the willow herb grows so thickly that the glades are bathed in a pink light. We came out into open country by the entrenchment at the top of Burton Down. I say 'open country', but in fact the Downs here are covered with a heavy scrub of little bushes, gorse and broom and box, and the open downland such as one finds going eastwards from Amberley Mount occurs only in rare patches. The scrub grows thicker every year, owing, it is said, to the decline of sheep farming—the sheep, I am told, used in some unaccountable way, to 'keep it under'—and this part of the Downs is a veritable wilderness. Human beings, thank the Lord, are a rarity, and Gumber Farm, just to the south of where we drew up, is said to be four miles from the nearest house. Through the scrub run long straight grassy tracks, and, having begun to canter, there is little reason why one should ever stop. The horses had galloped for the best part of a mile to bring us up to the entrenchment, and we dismounted to let them cool. The view from this point is, to my mind, as good as any that the south of England has to offer. To the north is a stretch of cultivated country round about Lavington and Burton Park. It is as yet quite untouched, and it is so perfect a specimen of all that England once was that any community with an ounce of concern for beauty would take immediate steps to preserve it from spoliation. In the foreground are farms of old Sussex brick, lovely lichened barns, ricks in fields, and old elms arranging themselves in attitudes charged with significance in

## *A Batch of Beauties*

formal groups. Behind is Burton Park, a first-rate eighteenth-century specimen of its kind. In the middle distance is the Weald, and the whole is backed by a screen of hills—Blackdown and Telegraph Hill, which is above Redford Common, the hills behind Fernhurst, and, in the far distance, Hascombe, Pitch, Holmbury and Leith. The whole was bathed in a mellow October light. . . . Being mindful of Dr. Johnson's warning—'If Mr. X—— has experienced the unutterable, Mr. X—— should not try to utter it'—I shall not even endeavour to express the feelings which this prospect aroused in me.

Most people would, I think, have preferred the view to the south. Here was a great stretch of woodland. One looked over the tops of trees flaming with October colours to Arundel Castle. Beyond was the sea. A shaft of sunlight shot down through a break in the clouds and lay full upon it, driving a silver furrow over the flat grey expanse. The prevailing colour of this whole southern view was a purplish brown—I have seen this colour often, looking southward from these Sussex Downs on autumn and winter days, but I have seen nothing quite like it anywhere else—shot through by this brilliant silver streak. . . . But I give up trying to convey what is manifestly beyond my powers. As we rode back over Bignor, West Burton and Bury Hills, we had a full view of the Amberley Wild Brooks, partly flooded now, with their backing of dark pine trees and heather country beyond. They provide just the right element of surprise in these otherwise homely views conveying, as they do, intimations of a larger countryside, and nature gods different and more aloof.

### *Amberley Wild Brooks*

In the evening I set off to walk across them to Pulborough. It was beginning to grow dark and the horror of the brick works that have been recently and scandalously established just beyond the northern end of the Brooks was mercifully veiled from me. These brick works, by the way, have caused me more heart burning than any other single countryside horror. The far side of the Amberley Wild Brooks has always been invested for me with a certain sanctity. A low wooded hill comes down to the edge of the water meadows, and between the two runs a path. The path is rarely used. I must have walked it a score of times without seeing a person, and as a consequence there is an abundance of wild life. Here are stoats, weasels, squirrels and more rabbits than I can remember to have seen in any

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

area of similar size. There are also the big birds which haunt the Brooks; at any moment one may see a heron or a snipe. Perhaps because of the multitude of wild things, perhaps because of the absence of people, perhaps because of the great beauty of the scene, the woods behind, the brooks full of detail and colour in the foreground, the clean lines of Amberley Down in the distance, the place has always seemed to me to be invested with a numinous quality. It is, as it were, slightly but pleasantly haunted. Here, if anywhere, one felt, the nature gods still stayed; this was one of their last lurking places, and, if one got lost, as I was lost once in a marsh mist on a summer night, unable to see a yard in front of me and apt to stumble into the ditches that criss-cross the Brooks, one felt them very near indeed, quite unpleasantly near in fact.

What is the correct thing to say about such places, what the right description for the experiences they give one, I do not know. I have made my own poor attempt to describe them in Part I with what results the reader is by now unfortunately aware. If the right thing has ever been said, our age has quite certainly forgotten what it is. But of this much, at least, I feel certain—the least sensitive of persons could not but have perceived that the place had an atmosphere. Even the least sensitive has here owned to a feeling of uneasiness, an uneasiness which in myself has on occasion amounted to positive awe.

### *Lapse into Mysticism*

Now it is difficult, God knows, for a middle-aged twentieth-century intellectual to feel awe. It is difficult for him to recognize the nearness of the unseen to the surface of what is seen; it is difficult even to arouse his sense of wonder. As for the recognition that a place may be 'numinous', or 'sanctified', or 'sacred', and the acknowledgment of and the humility which is appropriate towards the 'sacred', such matters are so completely outside his experience, that the words that I have put in inverted commas have practically disappeared from his vocabulary. Take at random a dozen books written by an average sample of the intellectuals of my generation, and you will not once come across any of them. Even if a twentieth-century writer does recognize the presence of such influences, even if he feels the emotions appropriate to them, he will evasively describe what he recognizes and miscall the emotion which he feels. This

## *A Batch of Beauties*

being so, my recognition of a something more in nature than meets the eye and the emotions that such recognition evokes in me seem to me to be invested with a certain contemporary significance. Having already made a considerable fuss about these occurrences in Part I, I now find somewhat to my embarrassment, that I am at them again. The reason is, no doubt, that I am mightily pleased with myself because of this ability of mine to recognize and to feel. Apart altogether from the fact that these experiences are pleasant in themselves, apart too from their strengthening and invigorating effect, so that, having enjoyed them, I feel better equipped for the business of living, they are for me the sole avenues of approach to a world of experience which is to all intents and purposes lost to my generation. Meagre and precarious as they are, these experiences of the numinous in nature are the solitary peephole through which I obtain a glimpse of an otherwise sealed realm, the realm of mystical experience. Now I know of no place in which I have enjoyed these experiences so often and in which I can so certainly rely upon enjoying them again as in the Amberley Wild Brooks. Hence my feeling of resentment for the brick works, which, perched upon the crest of the low hill which closes in the Brooks on the north, scarify the eye of the beholder for miles around, bring a stream of workpeople to the district and fill its roads with thunderous lorries. Is nothing safe, one wonders, in this infinitely pervasive, infinitely insatiable world of modern industrialism? Is nothing that is beautiful anywhere to be preserved? And the answer of course is that nothing *is* safe and that beauty *is* nowhere to be preserved.

### *The Great Car Road at Night*

Since it was a Sunday evening, the brickworks were deserted. I passed through them, and after some adventures in the gathering darkness in the flooded meadows on their far side, came out on the road. This used to be a small by-road, whose clay-coloured surface harmonized admirably with the green of the marshland on its verge. Every two or three hundred yards or so it was crossed by a gate. The gates have now been taken away for the greater convenience of cars and the native surface has disappeared under the inevitable coat of tarmac. The road no longer harmonizes. It is no longer an integral part of the land, but a black weal left by the whip lash of progress upon its face. Here are two bridges over the Arun, the one built in



*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

the sixteenth century is gracious and dignified, its great stone bastions stretching out into the stream; the other, built in the twentieth century, is a structure of metal and concrete topped by railings in case passers-by, appalled by its ugliness, should manifest any symptoms of wishing to escape from it and the age that produced it by throwing themselves into the river. Next came the village of Coldwaltham, and then a two-mile stretch along the main road to Pulborough.

I have written elsewhere of main roads, and I cannot here with decency lash myself into a further outbreak of the fury that they engender. Besides, the capacity for indignation grows fatigued. But to-night there was established a new count in my indictment against the car which I cannot forbear to mention. As I have already explained, I rarely walk on main roads. I will, indeed, go to any length of trespassing and extra mileage to avoid the metal monsters which hurl themselves over their surface. It was years since I had walked upon a main road at night. Now that I did so, I was made aware of a new horror. That cars offended the senses of hearing and of smell, I already knew. It was only on this night walk that I was made to realize how they outrage the sense of sight. A glow would appear round a corner or over a rise. Gradually it would grow in brightness and then, quite suddenly, a glare of scarifying brilliance would burst upon one's shrinking eyeballs. The impact of the hard white light shocked and stunned the eyes. To look in its direction was literally a pain, yet not to look was to put oneself at the mercy of the oncoming machine. The best course, I found, was to shrink into the hedge shading the eyes with the hand until the thing had passed. As the cars followed one another at the rate of one a minute, my progress was slow. Only one motorist in every dozen thought to temper the glare of his light to the blinded pedestrian, and my subsiding into the hedge were so frequent, that it presently became clear that I was going to miss my train; so that when, presently, a faint sound of singing caught my attention, I stopped to listen. The sound came from a tiny building on the side of the road which I presently found to be a church. I leant on the gate which gave on to the road to listen. The voices were female, and so thin and meagre was their sound that it was obliterated every time a car passed. As the cars continued to follow one another at the same rate, the singing was conveyed with a curiously punctuated effect, gentle, mournful voices



## *A Batch of Beauties*

and grinding, screeching din succeeding one another in a more or less regular rhythm.

### *Record of the Church*

Leaning on the gate I experienced my moment of sentiment. I am not, God knows, an admirer of the Church. I know too much of its record. For hundreds of years, while it had the power, it suppressed, persecuted and tortured. When its power was taken away from it, it proceeded for another hundred to withstand and obstruct, delaying every attempt to alleviate the miseries of the suffering or to enlighten the minds of the ignorant.

When science made it possible to fight smallpox epidemics, churchmen opposed the necessary sanitary measures as an attempt to escape merited punishment, and denounced vaccination as 'an offence to God'. When chloroform was invented, they opposed its use, especially in childbirth—had not God laid a primeval curse upon woman?—and denounced it as 'an offence to God'. A hundred years ago, when the discovery of the steam engine made railways possible, the clergy preached against them as being 'unnatural' and a sin against God, as witness the following from an American newspaper of the time:

'You are welcome to use the schoolroom to debate proper questions in, but such things as railroads and telegraphs are impossibilities and rank infidelity. There is nothing in the word of God about them. If God had designed that His intelligent creatures should travel at the frightful speed of fifteen miles an hour by steam, He would have foretold it through His Holy Prophets. It is a device of Satan to lead immortal souls down to Hell.'

In the eighteenth century the clergy opposed the use of lightning conductors as an interference with God's intentions; in the sixteenth they opposed the introduction of forks for use at table, and denounced them from the pulpit! Nor is it only innovations designed to brighten human life or to alleviate human pain that have come under the ban.

Every claim for justice, every appeal to reason, every movement for equality, every proposal to relieve the poverty, to mitigate the savagery, or to enlighten the ignorance of the masses has been morally certain to encounter the opposition of the Church. From many similar instances I cite a few at random. The clergy of the

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

Established Church either actively opposed or were completely indifferent to the abolition of the slave trade. Even the pious Churchman Wilberforce, writing in 1832, was compelled to admit that 'the Church clergy have been shamefully lukewarm in the cause of slavery abolition'. They opposed the movement for the abolition of the Rotten Boroughs, prophesying that, if the Reform Bill of 1832 was carried, it would lead to the destruction of the Establishment. They opposed in 1806 Whitbread's Bill to establish parish schools in England out of the rates, the Archbishop complaining that the proposal would take too much power from the clergy. State education was indeed persistently and at all times opposed by the Church, because 'it would enable the labouring classes to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity'.<sup>1</sup>

In the 'thirties and 'forties the Church clergy of all sections denounced the Chartists with as much vigour as their successors seventy years later were to denounce strikers and Socialists, while the Tractarians preached against all those who 'taught the people to rail against their social superiors'. In the 'seventies Joseph Arch found the rural clergy, with some few exceptions, actively hostile to his movement to procure a living wage for the half-starved agricultural labourers.

I have a habit of jotting down on the blank pages which publishers are so good as to include at the end of books, references to whatever in the book has particularly struck me. An informal private index results. At the end of my copy of Sir G. M. Trevelyan's *British History in the Nineteenth Century* I find a large number of entries under 'Clergy', each of which relates to an occasion on which clergymen are described as opposing something or other which was subsequently adopted, and is to-day taken for granted as part of our national life. I see that after a number of these entries I have been content to note merely the page reference followed by 'The clergy "at it" again', the safe presumption being that there is only one kind of activity for which the clergy get a mention in the later history books, that of opposition, generally ineffective. And this is, in fact, the chief impression one gets of them.

To-day the Church has lost most of its power. But it still, by opposing divorce, frowning upon birth control and ferociously

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Giddy, afterwards President of the Royal Society under the name of Gilbert, in 1807.

## *A Batch of Beauties*

penalizing abortion, manages to add to the sum of human misery; it still gives its moral support to a grossly unjust economic system, and it still authorizes and approves of the mass slaughter of civilians which is the modern equivalent for war, whenever the Government of the State to which it is tied thinks the slaughter of the civilians of other States desirable. And all these things it contrives to do to such purpose and effect that the jibe heard in the House of Commons on the occasion of the debate on the Revised Prayer Book, 'For God's sake don't touch the Church of England; it is the only thing that stands between us and Christianity' is felt only doubtfully to overstep the limits of fair comment. No, I am no friend to the Church.

### *Sentiment about the Church*

And yet, I repeat, I had my moment of sentiment. In one form or another the Church had dominated the national scene for nearly a thousand years; admittedly it had persecuted, tyrannized, obstructed, interfered, but at least it had dominated. Now there is always a certain sadness in the humiliation of a once great power. Moreover, I had been brought up in the Church. All my childhood I had regularly attended, once every Sunday morning, the country church of a Midland village, and though my memories were chiefly of boredom and bewilderment, something of the beauty of the building and the service must have penetrated into my unconscious mind and sweetened my memories. The wording of the Book of English Common Prayer is very beautiful; so too is the music of the psalms. It is in the hope that I may again experience this beauty that I go into a village church whenever I get the chance and listen to the singing and the prayers; I did so on this occasion. As I walked up the path and opened the door, the thin trickle of sound came to an end. The psalms had ended, the First Lesson had begun. I walked in and sat down. There were five worshippers, all of whom were women; there was the clergyman reading the Lesson and an uncountable number of small children in the choir. Even here the sound of the passing cars could be plainly heard. The clergyman was elderly and his voice far from strong, so that, whenever a more than usually blatant car was in transit, he became inaudible. This literal blotting out of God's message by motor-cars seemed to me the most appropriate commentary upon the valuations of the modern world that events have had the sense of dramatic fitness to provide. It was a veritable par-

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

able. I thought of the past history of the Church, of the noble army of martyrs, of the Communion of Saints, of the Resurrection of the Dead, of the popes and cardinals, of the archbishops and the bishops, of the disputes and denunciations, of the heresies and controversies, of the wars and counter-wars, and of how men had laid down their lives for a dogma or a creed. I thought of the panoply and parade, of the great Princes of the Church, of the Church's might, dominion, majesty and power, of the great noise it had made in the world, and of how its message had come thundering into the ears of men; and now this thunderous message had trickled away to a thin murmur of sound, to be obliterated by every passing car. And, surprisingly, I was sorry.

### *Disabling Materialism of the Age*

I am, I repeat, no friend of the Church. But the Church did at least stand for the recognition of the existence in the universe of things other than material things. The world, it proclaimed, is not exclusively composed of matter; there is also spirit. Man is not all body; his body is animated by a mind and harbours a soul. Material values, then, are not the only values, and bodily pleasures not the only pleasures. There is, moreover, an unseen world, with which man can enter into relation. This world contains holiness, goodness and beauty, and these man's spirit can recognize and revere.

Now granted that the creed in which these assertions are embodied is almost certainly untrue, granted that they have been advocated with a proselytizing zeal, which, claiming omniscience, has supplied the place of knowledge by converting its conjectures into dogmas and consigning to eternal torment whoever refuses to share the dogmas; nevertheless, the assertions themselves are, I hold, in some sense true, and it is upon man's increasing recognition of their truth that the advance of our race depends. Meanwhile, it is our ability to perceive beauty, to know truth, to increase goodness, to establish, in a word, relations with this non-material world, that confers upon us the most valuable experiences which in our present state of evolution we are capable of enjoying.

Of the truths to which I have just drawn attention the modern world is increasingly oblivious. Increasingly, it believes that matter is all and that the only way to explore the universe is to pursue the methods of science. Increasingly, it insists that man is all body, and



## *A Batch of Beauties*

that the pleasures of the body are, therefore, the only pleasures. Even when it officially asserts the opposite of these things, it acts as if in its heart it still believed them. Now the only thing to be done with matter is to move it. It follows that the movement of matter from one place to another increasingly monopolizes the admiration of the modern world. Hence the cult of speed, a world perpetually in transit, a generation which cares not whither it moves so long as it moves somewhither, and a starvation of the spirit such as the world has not known since Christianity came on the scene. Of these ideals, pursuits and lacks the car is at once the symbol and the instrument. Therefore, in the current suit of car versus Church I am on the side of the Church. Yet the suit is almost certainly a lost one. Increasingly, the voice of the Church is drowned by the grinding of gears, and soon we shall not be able to hear it any longer. So far as present indications go, it seems not unlikely that organized Christianity will disappear within the next hundred years. It is probable, however, that the services of English country churches will retain an interest for overseas visitors for many years to come, and it is quite conceivable that the Church, in company with the House of Commons and the Royal Family, may ultimately be subsidized as a picturesque survival by some later successor of the Carnegie Trust, sentimentally anxious to maintain links with the past.

## II. OPERA AT GLYNDEBOURNE

### *The Expense*

To go to Glyndebourne is an expensive business. Thirty shillings is the lowest price for a seat. The third-class train fare to Lewes is 6s. 6d. return; at Lewes you take a motor-bus which costs you 2s. 6d., and your return train lands you in London too late to catch the last tube to Hampstead, so that your expedition is topped off by an extra 5s. for a taxi. It is difficult, too, to spend an evening at Glyndebourne without spending money. There is an interval of an hour and a quarter for dinner which is served at 10s. a head, although there is a supper at 5s. Admittedly you may take your own food and may eat it without apparent shame at spare tables in the dining-room or, if the weather be fine, on a seat on the lawn, or even in a punt on the lake—you can also, incidentally, take your own servants to wait on you while you eat it—but it is difficult to abstain from a drink, even if it is only a cup of coffee, and 'a coffee' at Glyndebourne—excellent



*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*  
coffee, admittedly—costs 1s. Thus with the best will in the world to avoid expense, the thing cannot be done under £2 at a minimum.

*Admonitions of W. J. Turner*

Is it worth it? W. J. Turner, who appears to me to write more sensibly about music than any other critic, has assured us in the *New Statesman* that it is. However poor you are, he wrote, you must, if you care for music, go to Glyndebourne. If you are very poor, you must deny yourself in order to do it. You must make of your visit, in fact, a self-denying ordinance, a sacrifice, and you will, he assured us, be amply repaid. For what, after all, is £2? The equivalent of half a year's tobacco, of twenty visits to the movies; of a cheap armchair, a dinner service or a new pair of boots. Now what are these things that they should be preferred to beauty? For beauty in the twentieth century is a rare thing. Should we not, then, be prepared to forgo not one but all of these things, provided that beauty be vouchsafed to us? And that there should be no mistake about the importance he attached to the matter, Mr. Turner went out of his way to follow up his article with a roneo-ed postcard addressed to some hundreds of *New Statesman* subscribers, apologizing for not having done adequate justice to the Glyndebourne opera in his public utterance, and imploring them on no account to miss so unique an occasion.

Turner was right, supremely right, and I am duly grateful to him. But for Turner I should never have gone, and I should have missed the greatest musical experience of my life.

*Past Opinions on Opera*

I am very far from being an opera lover, but I have an admiration for Mozart and go whenever I can to the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells to hear *Figaro*, *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni*. The performances are, I suppose, as good as can be expected in the circumstances, and anyway I am sufficiently ravished by the music to overlook whatever defects there may be. I know very little about singing, and have been apt when listening to a Mozart opera to regard the singer as an intrusion. 'Why will not these people on the stage stop making a noise?' I have asked myself impatiently, 'that I may listen undisturbed to this entrancing accompaniment? For', I have assured myself, 'what I care about is the music and not the performance. I would sooner hear first-rate music murdered than second-rate music ren-

## *A Batch of Beauties*

dered to perfection. So that it be Mozart, nothing else matters.'

All these opinions died within me on the night I went to Glyndebourne, died never to be reborn. As I listened to the first bars of the Overture to *Il Seraglio*, I realized that never in my life had I heard such playing. As I listened to the first notes of Osmin's song, I realized that I had never heard singing at all. Now for the first time I realized that singing was an activity, the expression of a dynamic spontaneity. The Glyndebourne singers attacked their songs; they did not merely respond to the stimulus of the music. Compared with them, the singers I had heard before seemed automatic, the noises they made a mere set of reflexes, passive responses of the singing organism to stimuli. The button is pressed and the singer emits. So, by contrast and in retrospect, appeared the singing of English singers.

### *The Singers at Glyndebourne*

Particularly was one struck by the loudness of these Continental voices. They were, it seemed to me, producing an immensely greater volume of sound than I had been accustomed to. Ivar Andrézen, as Osmin, possessed, I think, the loudest voice I had ever listened to. Partly, no doubt, the admirable acoustic properties of the Glyndebourne opera house accounted for this effect; partly, too, its smallness. In the vast spaces of Covent Garden people must roar and howl to make themselves heard, and, even so, their roaring and howling comes to one with a faintly muffled effect. But the favourable environment at Glyndebourne was not entirely responsible for the difference. The chief reason was, it was obvious, the superiority of the voices. When the singers to whom I had been accustomed wanted to sing loudly, their voices had, or so it seemed to me, passed out of their control. Roaring and shouting, they produced harsh unmusical noises which gave no pleasure in the hearing. Moreover, the obvious sense of strain and effort precluded the continuance of the exhibition for any length of time. Nobody so labouring could, one felt, sustain the effort for long. Nor did they sustain it.

These better quality voices were able to take their loud notes as it were in their stride. There was no sense of strain and no roaring. However loud the singing, it remained perfectly musical, resulting in clear, crisp, bell-like tones which literally echoed and re-echoed through the chambers of one's consciousness, setting every nerve of one's being vibrating to the most exquisitely pleasurable sensations.

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

And because this loud singing was always clear and beautiful, and because the singers could keep it up without tiring or straining themselves, the general volume of noise produced was very much greater than that to which I had been accustomed at the Old Vic, at Sadlers Wells, or even at Covent Garden. Moreover, singing normally at this louder level, the Glyndebourne singers had at their disposal a greater range of gradation for quieter singing.

As with the principals, so with the chorus. I had been accustomed to regard the singing of choruses in opera as an unimportant interlude, providing a welcome relaxation from the strain involved in continuous attention. The chorus functioned, and for a time one could afford not to listen. Mozart's tuttis, in particular, have always seemed to me rather conventional; I have thought of them as padding inserted to conform to the proprieties and give the rank and file something to do. But the singing of the choruses at Glyndebourne was a positive, active affair, a great volume of musical sound coming at one from the stage, taking one's attention as it were by the throat, and compelling one to listen. Here was no blanket of woolly sound; the different parts were clearly distinguishable. So also were the individual voices which, though singing in perfect harmony, were yet perceptible as the utterances of distinct persons.

### *The Effect*

The total effect upon me of all these excellences was tremendous. I had heard great singers before, but they had stood out against a featureless background, like plums in dough. But here the cake was all plums, or rather, for the metaphor grows misleading, here was a perfect whole in which each part enhanced and was enhanced by the rest.

The excitement aroused by the beauty of the music was reinforced by the beauty of the place. Glyndebourne is the perfect residence of an English gentleman. It stands in a fold of the downs in the centre of a park, where great trees grow upon smooth lawns. The lawns stretch to meadows, which, at the time of my visit, were under tall grass, or, where they had been mown, dotted with mounds of new-cut hay. A pond was covered with water-lilies, and the lawns immediately surrounding the house were bordered with a great mass of June flowers. My first visit was on the evening of an exceptionally hot day. There was a red sunset, a fume of gnats danced over the still pool, and

## *A Batch of Beauties*

presently a nearly full moon rose. The beautiful grounds, the tranquil evening, the enchanting music invested the occasion with a glamour which I have not known since I was a young, romantic chap with a confused sense of reality, who lived in the constant expectation of meeting beautiful and exciting experiences round each of life's corners.

### *Another Lapse into Mysticism*

To keep the palate fresh for experience is an achievement which civilization renders increasingly difficult. All too quickly, one comes to believe that all sensations are known, and that life has nothing fresh to offer. When one is young, it is not so. There have been times in my life, when, for example, as a young man of twenty, I first went on a reading party to an island off the coast of Brittany, when the most trivial incident was apt to be invested with a significance, as thrilling as it was unaccountable. At any moment, one felt, a door might open, a shutter be raised, letting one through into a different world, different and more exciting. Admittedly, one never quite got to this world; but the sense of its nearness, and the feeling that one was trembling on the very verge of its discovery, invested with a new significance the common things of life, so that sitting at a table under the trees drinking an aperitif, or spending an hour half reading, half musing upon a shelf of rock overlooking a sea dotted with little islands, were experiences instinct with an emotional quality that I have never forgotten, and never recaptured. It was exactly as if one were sitting chained under the shadow of a hill on the other side of which was a great light. Unable to move, one could not go where the light was. Yet from time to time there would come darting over the brow of the hill gleams and flashes of radiance to dazzle and to gladden the eyes of him who was in darkness, so that he knew for a certainty that the lighted place was there, yet because of his dazzlement could not say what manner of place it might be, or what sort of light it was that came to him, and, even as he watched, the gleams faded and failed, so that he was left wondering whether he had truly seen them or not.

All this, I am afraid, sounds pretty mystical, and it is, I am aware, a totally inadequate way of describing an experience which is no doubt indescribable. I will content myself, therefore, with saying that I did as a young man from time to time enjoy moving experi-



*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*  
ences which I can neither account for nor describe, except to say that they were in some way bound up with beauty, that in middle age these experiences have almost entirely ceased, so that I have come to doubt whether I ever had them, but that on this evening at Glyndebourne I no longer doubted, because what was indubitably one of them had occurred. If I were to say that it was not alone the music, or the beauty of the grounds, or the cool loveliness of the evening after the trying heat of the day, but was somehow all of these things together, I should be near the truth, while yet I missed it. For, indeed, it was not all of them in sum, but an added character or quality which seemed to attach itself to their sum.

As we walked in the gardens after the enchanting second act, we passed two middle-aged ladies—at least, I think one was the daughter of the other, but both had that ageless look which only English ladies of a certain class seem mysteriously to acquire—closely enough to hear snatches of their conversation. ‘I always tell Joan,’ one of them was saying, ‘that the oil stoves ought to be cleaned and filled every day. But she won’t listen.’ It is nice to think that Mozart did not live in vain.

### III. NOSTALGIA FOR OXFORD

#### *Misjudgment by Oxford Authorities*

I loved Oxford first because of people and ideas; I love it now for its beauty. For years I have haunted the place, drawn by a charm which I cannot hope to analyse, always more or less miserable because I am a visitor not a resident, always nourishing the hope that before I die I may achieve my ambition, become a don and end my days in a college. For twenty-three years I have been trying intermittently to get back to Oxford, without, however, as I can see now, the slightest chance of success. I have let off too many intellectual fireworks in my time, fireworks not always in the best of taste. For example, I was during the war a strident pacifist. I am apt to be irreverent and disrespectful to the Church—at least, I used to be<sup>1</sup>—and quite recently there was that lamentable business of the Oxford Resolution.

I cannot help thinking that the continued indifference to my aspirations which is maintained by their object is a pity, a pity from more points of view than one. I should have made a good don, which is

<sup>1</sup> See above p. 57, for a typical example.



## *A Batch of Beauties*

more than can be said of most. I am intellectually sympathetic and can enter into the minds of the young; I can teach anything to anybody; I can lecture clearly and attractively, and, almost alone among the Oxford men of my generation whom I know, I have constantly wished to return to Oxford, admiring and defending the place instead of belittling it, and keeping the flame of my reverence constantly burning in a private shrine of my own. Also, I doubt if I should now say anything very dreadful. For one thing, I am now forty-five and comparatively tame. For another, I should be much too delighted at my good fortune in getting back to the academic preserves ever to endanger my position by a repetition of the indiscretions which have excluded me. The University authorities are not, I suspect, very good psychologists. If they were, they would see that I have every incentive to be a good boy now, and that to all intents and purposes I am already nine parts of a good boy without any incentive at all.

### *The Fellows' Garden*

However that may be, Oxford would have none of me in the past and I doubt whether it will have any of me in the future. Hence it is as a stranger with no status, with no footing in the colleges, with not even a house in the Banbury Road, that I make my frequent visits. I generally excuse and justify these visits by accepting an invitation to address an undergraduate society. Having made my contact with the contemporary life of the place, always very pleasant and stimulating, although perhaps not, so far as I am concerned, quite so stimulating as it used to be—I am just getting to the age when I am beginning to wonder why undergraduates are so much alike—I go off by myself to worship at some particular shrine of Oxford's beauty. Increasingly, of recent years my temple has been the Fellows' Garden of Magdalen College. It is, I believe, closed to the public, but once upon a time I knew a Magdalen don who occasionally took me there, and I have gone there ever since, prepared to give his name as a talisman, if challenged by the guardians of the place. Many years have passed since I knew this don, and I doubt very much whether he still exists; but my presence has never<sup>1</sup> been challenged, and the matter has not, therefore, been put to the test. Anyway, mine is a harmless piece of trespassing, the expression of a mood very different from the

<sup>1</sup> It hadn't in 1936. It has now, but the affair passed off very well C.E.M.J. 1943.

*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*  
spiritual vagrancies recorded in Part I, and I think the authorities of Oxford University who have so long and so persistently denied me a place at their table might in common charity permit me to gobble up this very tiny crumb which falls from it for me every spring.

For it is in late spring that I chiefly go there. Taking a punt up the Cherwell from Magdalen Bridge, I disembark some distance below the rollers, and climb up the bank into the long narrow garden running beside the river, from which it is separated by a steep grassy slope, topped by trees and flowering shrubs. The garden is quite beautifully kept. The grass is green and shaven, the beds filled with a great variety of tastefully arranged flowers, and the fruit trees covered with an almost incredible profusion of blossom. The lilacs and rhododendrons are as fine as can be seen anywhere and there are a number of great bird-cherry trees. Trees growing on lawns constitute to my mind one of the most beautiful combinations in nature, and all these bird-cherries spring straight from the grass. There is great formality in the arrangement of this garden, but the formality is never prim. It never, for example, excludes gaiety, and the place is very gay with wallflowers and forget-me-nots and aubretia. It is, too, alive with birds. Here in these latter years I have sat for hours at a time on a seat at the edge of a little lawn. At my back is a flight of steps running down to the Cherwell, in front a cherry tree, one of the largest I have seen, which in springtime is a solid mass of living white. Under the tree is a little statue of a garden god. Two faun-like ears show through his curly hair and from his open mouth a thin jet of water continuously pours.

#### *Conversation at Tea*

I return in a mood of quiet contentment which not even the ganglion of vulgarity about Magdalen Bridge—you can not only hear, you can smell modern civilization a quarter of a mile away—can shatter. At least it reasserts itself as, after tea in the rooms of some young don, I go for a walk round the quad or cloisters of the college. How keenly, I am thinking, I have enjoyed the conversation, a conversation quick-moving and allusive, to which each person present has contributed his quota, depending for its comprehension and significance upon a common background of culture, a common knowledge of ideas, and of the history of ideas. At its best it can attain something of the significance of a work of art. It has, for example,

## *A Batch of Beauties*

beauty; but its beauty is a by-product thrown up incidentally in the course of their functioning by trained and cultivated minds, so completely masters of their subject that they can afford to be at play with it. Aristotle, as is well known, maintains that pleasure is a by-product. It is, he says, like the bloom on the cheek of a young man in perfect health. Pleasure is not necessary to the proper functioning of mind and body, and it is certainly not the aim of their functioning. But it supervenes as a something added, when both are in proper condition and are going about their proper business. As it is with pleasure, so too, I believe, is it with beauty. Both elude direct pursuit; neither can be taken by storm. Beauty is not a house that can be built with men's hands. It is a song that surprises you, which you hear as you pass the hedge, rising suddenly into the night and dying down again. Beauty and pleasure are essential accompaniments of a work of art, the beauty that attaches to it, the pleasure that it gives. The play of ideas which is the essential element in a good general conversation engenders both, throwing off the first as a by-product and communicating the second as an effect. Like all works of art, good general conversation is quite useless. It is also, like all the valuable products of a high state of culture, completely at the mercy of any hostile influence. For example, it is at the mercy of a bore and it is rarely that it survives the presence of a woman. How seldom, in ordinary societies, are these conditions of good conversation satisfied? How seldom are men allowed to talk at their ease, undisturbed by bores, undistracted by women?

Most women seem to be incapable of taking part in a conversation on general topics. They cannot, it seems, stray beyond the horizon of their own personal and parochial interests. It is not clear to them why there should be talk about matters which cannot possibly advantage or affect anybody present. Yet having learnt that this sort of talk is valued by men, they do their best to ape it. How unsuccessfully! Seeking to join in a play of ideas, they succeed only in airing a swarm of prejudices. It is only at Oxford, I reflected, that one can exchange ideas without the constant feeling that one has made a bad bargain; it is only at Oxford that one can experience the salutary and delightful experience of contact with an obviously superior intelligence, a contact in which one receives intellectually more than one gives. Reflecting upon my afternoon by the river, and the conversation that I had enjoyed at tea, I decided, as I walked round the quad-

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

rangle before dressing for dinner, that Oxford contains in their highest development the two things I most value—beauty and intelligence. And, what is more valuable still, the two blend. Hard and brilliant and modern as was the talk to which I had just listened, it seemed somehow to find its perfect environment in this atmosphere of grey stone and obsolescent ecclesiasticism, as a brilliant diamond is most perfectly set upon the smooth forehead of a beautiful but stupid woman.

### *Compensations for Middle Age*

I have come, I think, at last to realize that my nostalgia for Oxford is born of a wistful craving for its beauty. During most of the time that I have longed for the career of a don, I have believed that the life of a teacher at Oxford could be of great significance in the modern world. Moulding and informing the minds of young men, turning them imperceptibly to the ends which appear to one to be good, one could, vicariously as it were, influence the course of events over which one had failed to obtain any direct control. Now I have rid myself of the delusion that the course of events is any longer controlled by the men whom Oxford sends into the world. Even if it were, I doubt whether the average don possesses over the average undergraduate the influence which my teachers exercised upon me. As an undergraduate I was, I now realize, to a quite exceptional degree intellectually impressionable. I did not merely take to ideas: ideas rushed to my head. It is terrifying to a middle-aged man conversing with undergraduates to listen to the strain of derisive commentary in which they discuss the failings and foibles of their dons. . . . But though the influence which I might have exerted over the minds of the young no longer seems as attractive as it did, the pull of Oxford's beauty grows stronger with the years. It is, indeed, the chief consolation for that waning of one's physical powers that comes with middle age, for one's difficulty in ascending mountains, one's new sense of effort in running down them, the slowness of recovery from fatigue, the obstinate refusal of scars to heal, of sprained limbs and twisted ankles to straighten themselves, the inability to play three sets of singles at tennis, the slowing up of one's footwork at the wicket, one's terrible exhaustion at hockey—it is, I say, some slight compensation for these things that one's sensibility to beauty increases. It increases in the sense that there are more things that move



## *A Batch of Beauties*

one æsthetically, and it increases—or, at least, I like to think it does—in the sense that they move one more deeply, so that one's pleasure in nature and in music, and, may I add, in wine and food, comes largely to replace the purely physical pleasures of the body.

### *The Author's Prose Style*

Herein, then, is the secret of Oxford's unfailing attraction for me, an attraction which grows greater with the passage of the years. Every time I go I see something which I had not noticed before, the carving on a church porch, some new combination of tree and stone, a vista of green through an open doorway, or the line of a college roof against the sky; and as always, when confronted with beauty, especially with beauty which has grown and accumulated upon me like the beauty of this city, I cannot just take it for granted. I want to make some personal acknowledgment of that which has so moved me. It is, I suppose, precisely this impulse that sets artists painting, musicians composing, and poets versifying. Not being an artist, musician, or poet, I have none of these outlets. I have, therefore, no means of celebrating the object of my delight except in prose. My prose is at the best flat and plain, and even in my most solemn passages irreverence will keep breaking in. I seem to be quite unable to write more than a couple of pages without introducing some comment that entirely dissipates the atmosphere I have been trying so laboriously to build up. I have found that these comments have the effect of annoying readers and preventing them from taking seriously any book in which they occur. Readers cannot, it seems, understand that the difference between writing amusingly and writing dully, is not the difference between levity and seriousness, but the difference between being an amusing and being a dull person. Now I do want some of my books, especially my philosophical ones, to be taken seriously. It is important, therefore, that I should keep my quips out of them. Accordingly, as I have already explained, I have been driven to write something else at the same time which will serve as a sort of dust-bin into which I can tip all the refuse irreverences that the Taoist in me insists on conceiving. Thus I usually have two books, a Confucian and a Taoist, on hand at the same time. Unfortunately, the present book is both of them rolled into one. In it I have promised myself to say precisely what I want to say in the precise way and at the precise moment at which I want to say it. The present



*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

chapter is a typical example of the mixture that results. I began it as one trying to do justice to all that Oxford has meant to him in the way of sentimental affection and æsthetic delight. I had determined on a really nice piece of writing. But cheerfulness has broken in, and a number of remarks about dons and women in the worst possible taste have, I see, irretrievably destroyed in the reader that mood of receptive acquiescence in which he might have been willing to listen to my wistful melancholizings about Oxford. Having spoiled the chapter, I had better finish it.

## THE CHINESE EXHIBITION

*The Author Recants*

In an earlier work<sup>1</sup> I observed that on reaching middle age my mind became closed. Since reaching the age of thirty, I had, I explained, remained unilluminated by new ideas, unvisited by new experiences. All that I had learnt, was to make more of the old ideas and to explore more fully experiences already enjoyed—for instance, those connected with the tasting of claret. This confession was not, I suggested, an indication of an unrepresentative humility on the part of the author, for my contemporaries, were, I hinted, in no better case than I was. Their minds, too, were closed; in them, too, the full tale of experiences was told—only, unlike myself, they did not know it. These disingenuous remarks provoked a storm of protest. The protests were usually couched in flattering terms—nobody, my scandalized contemporaries averred, seemed to them to bring a greater gusto to the business of living than I; nobody appeared to be a more continuous fount of ideas. In fact, if a defect were to be found in me, it was precisely the opposite to that which I avowed. My mind was not closed, it was all too irresponsibly open, open for anything new, whether good, bad, or indifferent, that chose to enter it. . . . But it was painfully obvious that my contemporaries were flattering me only in order to defend themselves. Their minds, they were convinced, were not as closed, their characters as set, as I made them out to be, and so, politely, they said, that *my* mind was not closed, *my* character was not set.

Well, I am now prepared to make reparation. I withdraw; I recant. Every now and then something really new in the way of thought and experience does happen in and to me. Not very often, I still insist, but still just occasionally, I do get the thrill of a new experience from which I derive, or think I do, a fresh insight into the nature of things.

*He Enjoys a New Experience*

Such an occasion was for me afforded by the Exhibition of Chinese

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Joad*, pp. 70, 71.

## *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

Art held in the Burlington Galleries in the autumn of 1935. I attended the Exhibition several times, and after each visit I felt that the horizon of my experience had been enlarged. In the strict sense of that over-used word, the Exhibition was 'stimulating'. I must insist that it was so in the 'strict sense' because the word 'stimulating' has been so rubbed and defaced by over use, has so lost its original significance, that I shall have to say what I mean by it. I mean, then, in particular, that I was provoked to reflect again upon a problem which has occupied my attention off and on over a period of many years, the problem of the nature and source of the appeal of great art; and, having reflected, I found to my delighted surprise that my reflections seemed to me to be new. Actually, I found, I was thinking something that I had never thought before: also I was moved to say things about the works of art that I saw at this Exhibition which I had never said before. In a word, then, my consciousness was stirred, and for the moment I achieved a new level of interest and, I hope, of understanding. I want to set down here some of the fruits of this stirred consciousness. I shall begin with impressions. These are strung on no continuous thread, nor do they culminate in any general conclusion; they are random and sporadic, the by-products of a consciousness stirred to activity by the experience of a new beauty.

### I. IMPRESSIONS

#### *Preliminary Impressions, Strangeness and Impersonality*

The first is a sense of strangeness. These tapestries and china figures and porcelains were quite unlike anything I had seen; the life that they represented was different from any that I had known, and they were the productions of people who were clearly different from any that I had known. These Chinese artists were persons totally different from myself, and the civilization that produced them was different from my civilization. Where ours was dynamic and restless, theirs, I was made to feel, was a quiet and static civilization, and its art was a quiet, unemphatic art. I do not mean merely that here were no nudes to excite the senses or battle scenes to alarm the mind; I mean that here were a complete absence of movement, and the desire to move. These artists, it seemed, were not restless people; they were content with themselves and what they were doing, and they neither sought nor expected appreciation for their work.

Even the best modern art conveys the feeling that it is produced for

## The Chinese Exhibition

an occasion; the artist, one feels, always has his eye on an audience. 'What', one can imagine him wondering, 'will the *Evening Standard* say about it to-night, or the *Observer* on Sunday, or the *Times Literary Supplement* on Saturday? Or Hollywood, or the H.M.V. Gramophone Company, or the Hanging Committee?' His work, in a word, is self-conscious. Now the Chinese give the impression that they are producing for no audience. There is no contract to be kept, and nobody is waiting to see the artist's results. He can permit himself, therefore, to take years over the production of a single set of panels. Possibly a friend or two may look in while they are being painted; possibly they may be shown to a few connoisseurs when they are finished, but it is quite possible that they may never be seen at all. This, I take it, is one of the reasons for the so-called universality of Chinese art. Not being addressed to any audience, its productions are equally suited to all audiences.

To put the point in another way, this is not a local art; it belongs to all peoples and to all times. In this respect Chinese art is like the music of Bach, which was composed with so little consciousness of those who might hear it, that it was frequently torn up after being played, lost or put to base uses. Compare a Bach Cantata with the music of Stravinski which produces an effect of topicality in every note, and the difference is immediately apparent.

### Quiet

Chinese art is very quiet. Somebody—I forget whom—has remarked that the greatest music of all is not a noise, but a silence. The paradox is, I suppose, intended to convey the sense of peace and finality that characterizes the greatest works of Bach and Mozart. The remark was brought forcibly to my mind by the Chinese tapestries and pictures. Predominant in the impression they produced was an absence of fuss. It is difficult to describe the extent to which they did *not* possess initiative, dynamism, enterprise, activity or 'whoosh', and, by virtue of their lack of these currently admired qualities, conveyed an implied criticism of a civilization that values movement for its own sake, irrespective of what is being moved, and of the place to which and the purpose for which it is being moved. The Chinese artists, one feels, were emphatically not among those moderns who think every place more desirable than the one in which they happen to be. In this sense of quietude lies, I think, one of the secrets of the

*The Author is Moved by and 'Reflects upon Beauty*

appeal of Chinese art. These tapestries and porcelains do for the processes of life, precisely what Bergson says the intellect does for them. Conceive of life, as Bergson does, as a dynamic impulsion, a continuous surge or flow; then change will be the innermost reality of whatever exists. But it is precisely as change or flow, says Bergson, that the intellect does not and cannot conceive of things; for the intellect is a practical faculty which has been evolved for the purposes of action. These, it serves, by making cuts across the flow of reality, arresting it and congealing, as it were, into a static immobility the length of the flow that it has arrested. As a result of these cuts, we see a world of solid objects extended in space, the world which in everyday life we inhabit, and which we falsely take for reality. Now, in ascribing this cutting up and congealing function to the intellect, Bergson is intending to disparage it, for the world is not such as the intellect represents it to be, and the view of it as solid and static is, not to mince words, an illusion. I do not agree with Bergson's philosophy, and I am not, therefore, disposed to dismiss as illusory the solid and static objects which appear to surround us; indeed, I should go further, and regard reality as static and changeless, so that the movement away from change is not for me a movement towards illusion but a movement towards reality.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Chinese Artist and the Cinema*

I shall return to this point later. Meanwhile, my concern is to point out that the function which Bergson ascribes to the intellect is performed by the Chinese. For their pictures are essentially pictures of experience arrested. The world, it seems, stopped still for them to paint it, so that the man sitting in a boat looking at a mountain might have been sitting there since the beginning of time and seems likely to go on sitting there until the end of time. In this respect—and the comparison has, I like to think, a symbolic significance—the processes which Chinese artists perform upon a landscape, are the exact reverse of those performed by the cinema. The cinema takes a number of separate photographs of a scene—a boat, let us say, rowing across a lake. What, in fact, the audience is looking at is an enormous number of photographs of separate static boats, rowing across an enormous number of separate static lakes, each boat and each lake

<sup>1</sup> For a development of these rather cryptic remarks, see my *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapters VI, VIII, and IX.



## *The Chinese Exhibition*

being almost exactly like the last. The illusion of continuity is produced by putting the separate, static photographs upon a spool and rotating it; thus the cinema, the characteristic art of to-day, imposes the illusion of continuity upon the reality of stationariness. A Chinese artist, concerned with the static rather than with the changing, seeks to introduce the illusion of stationariness into the reality of change.

Why does he seek to do this? In the last resort, I suggest, because art is the window through which man may look upon reality, and reality is, in itself, changeless. Hence the greatest art, which is also the art that comes nearest to the representation of reality, tends to convey an effect of peace and tranquillity; in other words, it moves in the direction of the changeless.

### *Art as a Refuge from Life*

There was, however, I imagine, another and a more human reason for this preoccupation of Chinese artists with the changeless. In all ages men have sought and found in art a refuge from the accidents of life. In life we are at the mercy of circumstances, oppressed by alien forces, influenced and, at times, compelled by men and things beyond our control. Throughout the greater part of Chinese history life seems to have been alarmingly insecure; murder, robbery and violence, piracy and war seem to have been continuous—or nearly so, for there were, no doubt, intermissions, albeit short. It seems only too likely, then, that it was in art, and more particularly in an art whose outstanding characteristic was tranquillity, that the cultured Chinaman sought at once a contrast with and a refuge from the vicissitudes of his life. In all ages, I suspect, artists have done the same.

But is it fanciful to suggest that in the modern world the escape that art provides is not so much from insecurity as from triviality? In England and France life is not, at least as yet, insecure. It is still secure; but it is devastatingly trivial. Vulgarities are the price which we pay for democracy, and modern man, with all the resources of science at his disposal, possesses an unprecedented opportunity for imposing his half-baked nature upon a defenceless world. He takes it, with the result that the Press and the radio, the motor-car and the movies, the dirt-track and the racing dogs spread their standardized pleasures over an ever-wider area. I am not complaining of this; it is better that men should amuse themselves trivially than that they should not amuse themselves at all, and it is not to be expected that

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

a population set free for the first time in history from bondage to intolerably exhausting labour, should take immediately to the more quintessential pleasures of the spirit; but I find it easy to understand how the artist, who is not the inheritor of centuries of overburdening toil and has always known more or less how to use his leisure, should rise in protest against the vulgarity of this new twentieth-century civilization and seek his escape in art. Hence, perhaps, the remoteness from ordinary life of so much modern art, the abstract pictures of shapes and lines and colours, the intolerably difficult poetry, the tuneless and inharmonious music.

### *The Unimportance of the Human*

One other passing impression! The Chinese pictures are almost always of mountains and lakes; great ranges of mountains, vast tracts of lake, with, in the foreground, a human figure. Not only is the human figure tiny, it is also dim and forlorn; it is almost as if it had been made deliberately dim and forlorn. The Chinese, it seems, had little interest in the human form—at any rate, they did not explore its æsthetic possibilities. It is not merely that in their pictures the human form is always veiled, but little effort is made to render even its veilings with accuracy and care. Human beings appear conventionally in Chinese landscapes, but it is not upon them that the interest is centred: indeed, so uniformly insignificant is their appearance, that one begins to wonder whether the insignificance is purely accidental. Is there not perhaps a deliberate intention at work here in the insertion of these negligible little creatures, these so desperately lonely figures, in an environment of natural objects so compelling and immense?

Modern Western man, in spite of all that physical science has to tell him about its immensity, still conceives of himself as the centre of the universe; often, indeed, he behaves as if the only function of the universe is to put him in its centre. At the heart of things, there is, he holds, something spiritual, something which is akin to himself, and, even if this something is no longer pictured as a large bearded man, it is, at least, a benevolent purpose working for men's good. Meanwhile, the theory of evolution, suitably rendered, has assured him that progress consists in the raising of each generation upon the shoulders of its predecessors to the achievement of greater knowledge, the acquisition of higher powers and the pursuit of a nobler life, and that in the long run evolution aims at nothing less than the

## *The Chinese Exhibition*

development of an even higher and nobler, yet still recognizably human species. One day we shall be so high and so noble as to be even as the Gods. So widely accepted are these implications of evolutionary teaching, that perfection has come increasingly to be conceived in terms of the ultimate development of human beings; perfection, in fact, is for us ideal human development. Thus we are presented by Alexander with the notion of an evolving deity brought progressively into existence by the development of man, and performing the function of a continuously receding goal or ideal to each fresh level of human achievement, and are encouraged by theologians to identify the purpose of the universe with the preparation for eternal life of a number of individual, human souls generally conceived in the likeness of modern Nordic adults.

So used are we to these conceptions, that we forget how comparatively modern they are. Looking back over the history of human thought, we shall be surprised to notice how rarely they have entered men's heads. For the most part, human beings have regarded the universe as fundamentally alien and non-human. For the savage, it is inhabited not only by the non-human forces of nature, but by non-human devils, non-human spirits and non-human gods.

The theologians of the middle ages agreed; the world, they held, was dominated by non-human factors. Admittedly, at the heart of things there was God; admittedly, reality was spiritual; but the God was not necessarily a man, the spirit not necessarily human. Good and evil were not the projections of human wishes, or the creations of human consciousness; they were real factors in the universe, existing in independence of man, which the human soul acknowledged but did not engender.

The human soul could recognize good and could and did pursue it; and, equally, it could go a-whoring after evil. But whether it recognized and pursued, made no difference to these aloof and independent principles which, ignorant of the travailing of the human soul, remained unelated by the success, undisturbed by the failure of its quest. The universe, in fact, was a very large and an inhuman place, upon the stage of which human beings played in due humility and unimportance their little parts.

### *The Greeks and Chinese Concur* \*

The view of the Greeks was not dissimilar. Human life was

## *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

moulded by destiny; the fates spun its threads and determined its end. Human conduct was governed by immutable principles not of our making. If, for example, a man committed aggression, or grew too large for his boots, then, infallibly, Nemesis would overtake him. But though human arrogance brought the law of destiny into play, the law was itself non-human; it was a part of the moral machinery of the universe. Non-human, too, is the Indian law of Karma. Karma is like a penny-in-the-slot machine; it is we who by our actions set the machine in motion, but once it *has* been set in motion, what falls to our lot, whether weal or woe, the life of a saint or the life of a pariah dog, is no longer within our control. It is only in western Europe, during the four hundred years which have elapsed since the Renaissance, that human beings, puffed up by science, have crept into the centre of the cosmic picture. To-day, in the West, they occupy, how unbecomingly, the limelight of the universe, and insist that the evolution of more and better human beings is at once the only imaginable meaning of progress and the only conceivable standard of value.

In Chinese pictures human beings are emphatically not in the centre. A world is portrayed dominated by natural forces which are alien from, which are even hostile to man. Into this world man has strayed by accident, a casual and incidental passenger. One day he will vacate the stage upon which he cuts so insignificant a figure, and the earth will revolve devoid of life or, at any rate, devoid of human life, through space and eternity.

'We must', I can conceive these Chinese painters reflecting, 'put men into our pictures, for the creatures admittedly exist; but at least, they need not appear to be important'. And so, as it were by afterthought, lonely little human figures are slipped into these vast courses of sky and mountain and lake.

## II. REFLECTIONS

### *Reminiscences of the Victorian Bedroom*

So much for impressions! I pass to philosophizings. As one walked through the galleries, one saw from time to time, carpets, tapestries and jars which seemed at first sight vaguely familiar. That pattern of roses, twigs and leaves—where, you wondered, had you seen it before, those so-pink roses and so-green leaves with brightly coloured little birds sitting on the twigs. Why, of course, it was on the wall-



## *The Chinese Exhibition*

paper of the servants' bedroom at home. Can it, then, you ask yourself, really be the case that these works of Chinese art, the greatest art that the world has known, resemble all that you have been brought up most to despise, decoration for its own sake, the sentimentalization of Nature, the merely pretty-pretty? Can it be that the masterpieces of the world's art call up images of bedroom paper in lodging-houses and cheap hotels; of over-furnished sitting-rooms complete with embroidered footstools, antimacassars on every chair, and mantelpieces hidden beneath a scurf of ornaments? Can it be that the Chinese are also Victorian? You draw nearer and look more closely, and quite suddenly you notice a difference. The gaudy carpet glows with an inner light which warms, which even excites you; the pattern of roses has a strangely moving quality. The resemblance, in a word, is only superficial, for there is something here which has a significance of its own, something which is a world away from the meaningless wallpapers of the Victorian bedroom.

Or, again, you see a few cups, plates, or vases in a glass case, the embodiments in clay or porcelain of geometrical shapes, of curves and squares and spirals and ovals, sometimes ornamented with devices in dull red, sometimes not. Now what is there, you wonder, about these objects to constitute them works of art? What is the source of their alleged value? Certainly you experience a strange pleasure as you look at them, a pleasure which grows as you return to look again and yet again. You are, indeed, curiously moved; you are even excited. But what account are you to give of your pleasure? Why should these simple objects so move you? And then you leave the exhibition for tea at a restaurant, and picking up a cup of apparently exactly similar design, you suddenly get an impression of utter deadness and triviality, such as you could not have believed so common and inoffensive an object could have evoked. Or you look into the window of a china shop. It is crowded with glasses and bowls and vases and jars, flawless glasses and bowls, perfectly proportioned vases and jars, turned out by the very latest and most efficient machines. How totally dull and trite and commonplace they seem to you. And you fall to wondering how it is that you have never noticed these qualities of commercial products before. It is, it is obvious, the works of Chinese art at which you have just been looking which, by virtue of their mysterious difference, have enabled you to detect the triviality, the æsthetic uninterestingness—if I may coin



### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

such an expression—of the objects that you usually see. But what is this difference and what account are you to give of it? The proportions of the mass-produced articles seem to be the same, the workmanship is not inferior, the colours are vivid, the texture flawless; yet your instinct is to judge them purely from the utilitarian standpoint. What can they do? Will they for instance pour well? Will they accommodate flowers? Will they, in fact, be serviceable? Never for a moment do they move you in and for themselves as objects of beauty. Yet this precisely is what Chinese art does do.

### *The Aesthetic Problem*

Let me—for in this difference, which I am trying to describe, the fundamental aesthetic problem seems to me to lie—let me cite one further illustration.

If I strike a dozen notes at random on the piano, I produce a series of noises. Noises may be analysed into waves in the atmosphere which, when they reach the place where my ear-drums are, set up a series of vibrations, which are conveyed along neural cords to my brain. Now all these processes taken together constitute, I suppose, what I call the noise. Or, if I were at pains to be completely accurate I should have to say that when these processes have occurred, and a great many more like them which I have not mentioned, then, as a result of their occurrence, I shall *have the sensation of hearing* a noise. I put it in this pedantic way because I want to bring out the point that *all* that happens when noises are heard as a result of notes being struck at random on the piano is completely describable by the sciences of physics, physiology and psychology. If a complete physical, physiological and psychological account were to be given of everything that happens when the notes are struck, I do not think that anything would have been left out. Now let us suppose that I arrange the notes in such a way that they form the statement of the theme of a Bach fugue. Since the notes actually struck are the same, the physical events that occur as a result of their being struck are the same. The accounts of what is happening given by the physicist, the physiologist and the psychologist still, therefore, apply. But this time there is a something added. In addition to the physical there is also the aesthetic effect. The statement of the theme of the fugue can thrill you to ecstasy—at least, it can thrill me. Of this added effect science can give absolutely no account. It can only register the fact that it occurs,

## *The Chinese Exhibition*

Presumably, there is something which accounts for this difference, but of this something, whatever it is, science has nothing to tell us. Nor is the reason far to seek; for the difference between the two sets of sounds is purely a difference of order, the sounds themselves being *ex-hypothesi* the same, and order is not a physical thing. What, then, is this pervasive quality of order, this pattern of notes composing the theme of the fugue which distinguishes them from the same notes struck at random? What is the pervasive quality of order or pattern in the lines and curves of the Chinese pots and vases which distinguishes them from the very similar lines and curves of the pots and vases in Woolworths' window, and which also distinguishes the designs on the Chinese tapestries and carpets from those on the wall-papers in the Victorian servants' bedrooms?

The question, I repeat, raises the fundamental aesthetic problem. To it there are a number of answers, all of which receive exemplification in the criticisms, expositions and commentaries which the Chinese Exhibition has provoked.

### *Alleged Vitality of Chinese Art*

It is said, for example, that what distinguishes the Chinese pictures, plaques and figures from others, is their vitality. Vitality seems, indeed, to be one of the qualities most commonly discerned in Chinese art. The pictures can scarcely be discussed without 'vitality' being mentioned. 'The Chinese', I read in an excellent article by Mr. Wackrill, 'were past masters in the art of catching the very essence of their subject in a few swift strokes of the brush. It is when we look at their creations that we realize fully how much of the spirit of the truth we have lost in our strivings after the letter, our preoccupations with anatomy, perspective, photographic verisimilitude.' Very good! But what is 'the truth' whose spirit 'we have lost', but which informs Chinese works of art? Not, it is clear, the truth which consists in accuracy of representation, for Mr. Wackrill is highly, and rightly, contemptuous of merely representational art. 'Any Royal Academy exhibitor', he writes, 'would be capable of producing something which, from an illusionist point of view, was far more like the object in question. In the case of a figure he could probably make a drawing which anatomically was more correct. . . . But the Chinese draughtsmen never fell into our fallacy of imagining that the most accurate reproduction was necessarily the most convincing. They knew in-

### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

stinctively that convincing representation did not follow from imitation of the material forms of things, but from the successful expression of the feelings that the artist derived from them. They knew that art was an affair of thought and emotion, not of mere manual dexterity in mimicking appearances.'

But if 'the truth' is not that of representation, about what, or of what, is it 'the truth'? Apparently of vitality. 'We suppose', Mr. Wackrill continues, 'a T'ang sculptor shaping a little clay figure of a boy. Part of the feeling of contemporaneousness, of present potency, that we shall one day get from it will depend on his success in capturing the living poise and gesture of his subject, the boy's awkward, shuffling gait.' I should be doing Mr. Wackrill an injustice, if I were to suggest that he thought the attraction of vitality to be the only, or even the main, attraction of a work of art. For it is in something quite different that, in his view, the real source of æsthetic value lies. 'To an even greater extent', he writes, 'the figure's life and animation will derive from its purely formal virtues; the significant way, for instance, in which it is built up on variations of the themes of the cone and the sphere. It will not only be lifelike, expressive; it will be beautiful as well.' What this 'something' is I shall try to consider in a moment.

Mr. Wackrill does, nevertheless, believe in this mysterious value of 'vitality' as well as in the 'purely formal virtues'; other writers on art, less wise than Mr. Wackrill, invoke vitality, as if it were the sole standard of value, while talk of 'vital art' or of 'vitality' in art is bandied about *ad nauseam* by members of cliques and coteries and the adherents of advanced modern schools. For my part, I am completely unable to understand it. To say of a work of art that it is 'vital' is clearly intended to convey praise. Now vital means 'like life', or 'evocative of life', or 'suggestive of life'. It is implied, then, that 'to be like life', 'to be evocative of life', or 'to be suggestive of life', is a good. Why? Possibly because 'life' *tout court* is a good. But is it? Obviously it is not. Good is an ethical term and from an ethical point of view lives, it is obvious, can vary in point of quality. The quality of life of the amœba or of the polyp, for example, seems to me to be not only different from a man's but—and I hope that the confession will not set the reader against me on the score of complacency—inferior. It is less vivid, less rich in sensation, less capable of the appreciation of Chartres Cathedral, of the music of Bach, or the line

## The Chinese Exhibition

of a Sussex down. Yet I have no reason to suppose that the polyp is any less alive than I am. So far as quantity is concerned, our respective degrees of livingness are, I see no reason to doubt, equal. Even among human beings some lives, I should venture to say, are less valuable than others, that of President Gomez than that of Michelangelo, that of Jack the Ripper than that of Mozart.

Life, indeed, as such cannot, it seems to me, be acclaimed a good, merely because it is life. Indiscriminate increase of population beyond the capacity of the country to feed it is, I should say, a definite evil; so is indiscriminate increase of many kinds of bacteria and even quite a moderate increase of cancer cells; life carries within itself not only ugliness, disease and pain, but the seeds of all that is vicious and hideous in human conduct. It is life that produces cruelty, torture, malice, treachery and rape.

There are, in short, good lives and bad, and if there are, it is not necessarily a good to be like life. But life, as such, if not good, is perhaps beautiful, so that to represent life, is to achieve the highest beauty of which art is capable. I do not think that this is so, but if it were so, why is not the photograph, which is the most representative, also the highest form of art? The answer to this question is not clear.

Finally, I am not sure that I know what the expression 'a vital work of art', means. It does not, presumably, mean that the work of art is alive; for clearly it is not alive. I conclude, then, that all that it can mean is 'like what is alive', or, as I have already suggested, 'evocative of', or 'reminiscent of what is alive'. But surely the original is better than the copy, the thing symbolized than that which symbolizes it. If the most we can say for art is that it is like life, or is evocative or suggestive or reminiscent of life, why have art at all, since already we have life? We have, indeed, too much life. I conclude that it is not life, as such, that the artist seeks to represent, but life plus something added. What that 'something' may be, I am proposing to consider in a moment. For the present, I am content to say that it is what I denote by the word 'beauty'. But if the object of art is to be beautiful, to say of it—by way of praise—that it is vital, is merely to babble.

I conclude, then, that it is not in their *vitality*, whatever the meaning we give to that ambiguous term, that the value of these works resides. Vital in one sense they certainly are; for admittedly, they seem, some of them, to be alive. Those curious animals and birds, those pigs and cats and ducks and parrots, which crouch and perch



### *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

on the tops of their stands and pedestals, look as if, at any moment, they were liable to stop crouching and perching and to spring and pounce. Indeed, so inscrutable is their look of cunning—or is it wisdom? Yet, I surmise, it is a thought too mischievous for wisdom—that you feel they are deliberately biding their time until, having caught you off your guard, they can spring or pounce to the greatest advantage. In this sense, perhaps, vitality may be conceded to them, but it is certainly not because of it that we value them; for animals and birds that are, in fact, alive are still more vital, and these we do not value. Since, then, these objects of Chinese art are, indeed, valuable, their value must reside in something other than their vitality.

### *That Chinese Art expresses Emotion*

It is said, again, that Chinese works of art are valuable because they express or convey emotion. I do not know a more misleading phrase. The emotion which, presumably, is deemed to be expressed is that felt by the artist, whether sculptor, painter, tapestry weaver or modeller of clay. But (1) How can emotion be expressed in a concrete object? (2) Why should such expression, even if it were possible, cause the object *in* which it takes place to become valuable?

The first objection is so simple that I hesitate to enlarge on it. A good picture, we are told, is not simply one which copies or represents a person or a scene. It is, indeed, like the person or scene which it purports to represent, but it is not *exactly* like it. Pictures by Chinese artists are, indeed, very little like it. Now, in so far as the picture is like the object which it represents, it does not, presumably, express anybody's emotion; it is too busy being a copy of Nature to have time or leisure to spare for being anything else. It is, therefore, presumably in respect of those aspects of it in virtue of which it differs from the object that it is said to express emotion. Something which is there in the scene is left out in the picture; something which is not there in the scene is included in the picture; and it is by virtue of this something omitted and this something included that the artist is held to convey his emotion and express his individuality. Possibly, in fact probably. But because certain features of the work of art owe their presence in it to the fact that the artist is such and such a person and has experienced such and such feelings, the work cannot, in any legitimate sense, be described as a projection of the artist's personality, or as an *expression* of his feelings.



## The Chinese Exhibition

Strictly speaking, only a body can express feeling. When I blush, cringe or break the furniture, my body expresses self-consciousness, fear or anger; but a reputation for shyness, a court martial for desertion, or a roomful of broken furniture, which are the consequences of my bodily activities, are not in any legitimate sense to be described as the expressions of my feelings. Similarly, when the artist experiences an emotion of a certain sort, his hands begin to transfer paint from a row of pots to a canvas. That this activity of painting expresses an emotion I am prepared to concede; I concede, further, that the nature of the picture is in some part determined by the nature of the emotion which the artist feels. But though the activity of painting, which is a form of bodily behaviour, expresses emotion, it is surely a misuse of language to say that *the result* of the activity, which is a worked piece of matter of a certain shape, texture and colour called a picture or a vase, can express or embody something other than itself, namely, the experiencing of a certain emotion by a mind. How, indeed, could a motionless piece of matter, which is a part of the physical world, express, or embody, or contain a series of psychological events which have occurred in a mind?

It may appear that I am making a fuss about a trifle of language. The question, however, seems to me to be important for the following reason. If you say that a work of art is the embodiment of the emotion or the expression of the individuality of the artist, it is difficult not to conclude that what gives it its value is the emotion expressed or the individuality embodied, and the natural inference is that the source of æsthetic value is something human. Now if there is one thing more than another of which I am convinced—I can only state the conviction dogmatically here; I have tried to defend it elsewhere<sup>1</sup>—it is that the source of æsthetic value is something which is non-human. Look at the line of a down against a sunset sky or the solid mass of an elm brooding solitary and remote over an empty field on an August evening; feel and smell the crispness of a winter morning of frost and sunlight or the smoke of dead leaves on a fading October afternoon. Is it not obvious, first, that the beauty which moves you is a non-human thing, and, secondly that it is not different in kind from the beauty of a work of art?

<sup>1</sup> See my *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapters VI and VIII.

## *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty Beauty as a Non-Human Value, Discerned not Created*

Beauty, in fact, is as remote from the human as is squareness, triangularity or truth. Human minds may discern beauty, but they do not manufacture it; human bodies may be beautiful, just as they may be dumpy or angular, but it is not in their beauty that their humanity resides. Now what the artist does is to catch the beauty that is latent in things and to embody it in his work. It is, no doubt, true that he would not willingly submit to the ardours and endurance which are necessary to effect such embodiment, unless he felt an emotion for the beauty he discerned, just as a fountain-pen would not write unless it were flowing with ink. But to say that what is produced is an *expression* of the emotion is like saying that what is written is an expression of the ink, the emotion, like the ink, being merely a necessary factor in the complicated process which results in the reproduction by human beings in physical things of the non-human beauty which there is in the world.

### *And Not Expressed*

I see that I have, by implication, already conveyed my objection to 'the expression' view of art. Why, I asked above, if art be the expression of emotion, should such expression invest the artistic object with value? There is nothing intrinsically valuable about human emotions. Some emotions, of course, are better than others. Men can feel generous emotions, fine emotions, exalted emotions and noble emotions, and we can admire them for feeling them. But our admiration is ethical; it is of the same kind as the admiration we feel for a good act or a strong character. It is not æsthetic; it is not, that is to say, like our admiration for a Bach fugue, or a painting by Giotto. Assuming, then, that human emotion could, in fact, in any meaningful sense be expressed in paint or stone or clay or porcelain, why, it may be asked, should its expression suddenly become imbued with æsthetic qualities, which it never possessed while it remained raw in the psychology of the artist? Why, in fact, should emotion invest with beauty the matter in which it is expressed, since it is very far from investing with beauty its owner? We know what artists are like, and though they are possessed of many excellent qualities and endearing charms they are not necessarily beautiful. On the contrary. . . .

I return again to the point which I have already reached. It is not human emotion which is the source of æsthetic value, but something

## *The Chinese Exhibition*

which evokes it, something which a person feeling the emotion manages to convey or to reproduce in his work of art, throwing up, as it were, into high relief the beauty his vision has discerned, so that it becomes perceptible to men of grosser sense.

### *What Beauty is Not*

What, then, is this something which, if I am right, is the source of the value we discern in works of art? I have already raised the question more than once, and I ought to try, however inadequately, to answer it. Not, I suggest, the shapes and forms of the physical world. Let us suppose that, for the sake of argument, we accept the view that what has evoked the artist's emotion is also the source of the value of that which he produces, that the work of art, in other words, is valuable and moves us because something else which was valuable has first moved the artist. Now it is impossible to ignore the fact that some of the works in the Chinese Exhibition owe little or nothing to the features of the material world. Some of them, indeed, are fairly representative—there are pictures of mountains and trees, figures of men and animals—but others are not representative at all. Here, for instance, is a vase modelled in clay, shaped like a cylinder and coloured white, which moves us aesthetically no less than the pictures of mountains and trees and the figures of men and animals.

Nor, I suggest, does the source of æsthetic value reside in vividness or intensity of colour. Some of the colours of these Chinese vases and carpets are, indeed, exceptionally beautiful—so rich, so deep that the vases and carpets glow with a kind of inner light. The dull reds and greens I found particularly lovely, especially when presented in combination as, for example, when a dull red device was embossed upon a jade green plate or cup. But here is a plain white dish edged with black! There is nothing remarkable in its colouring; so little remarkable is it, that for once, I believe, the white really could have been matched at the china shop across the way. Yet the plain white dish is as significant as the gorgeous greens and reds.

Nor is it to be found in intricacy of design. Some of the designs are, it is true, enormously complicated. With loving care, with untiring patience, with incredible skill the Chinese painted on silk and porcelain patterns of infinite complexity. There must be hundreds of thousands of separate strokes in the design of the branches and twigs painted on the cup at which I am looking as I make these notes. And,

## *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

inevitably, the question presents itself—I have been asked it a dozen times by my companion, as I walk through the rooms—‘How on earth did they do it?’ The question is natural enough. In an age in which only a machine could be capable of such enormous elaboration, we are not used to beholding the life work of a single pair of hands. But the beauty lies not in the elaboration of the design any more than in the depth of the colour, for here is an egg-shaped piece of glass, without design or pattern of any kind, which seems to me as lovely as the most cunningly wrought piece of metal, the most elaborately tinted piece of china. I conclude that the secret of the beauty which moves us in Chinese art does not lie either in the presence or absence of colour or in the presence or absence of patterned complexity.

### *In What Does Beauty Consist?*

Where, then, is it to be found? Again my question, and this time I must try to answer it. The superficial answer is clear. It is to be found in certain formal arrangements of lines and shapes, to which colour may or may not be added. It is because the shapes and curves of a Chinese vase are related in a particular way and those of a Woolworth's vase are related in a different way, that the one moves us and the other does not, just as it is because the notes which constitute the statement of the theme of a Bach fugue are related in one way while the same notes, struck at random on a piano, are related in another, that the Bach arrangement moves us and the random arrangement does not. It may be, of course, that the curves, the lines, the colours are in themselves different, and that the answer to our question does not lie *merely* in some secret of relation or arrangement which, discerned by the Chinese artist, has nevertheless, escaped the modern machine. It may be, but I do not think that it is, because sometimes the curves appear to be quite simply and obviously circles and ellipses, just as the colours appear to be quite simple and obvious whites and blacks. It is, then, I conclude, in the way in which they are related to and connected with one another that their significance lies. A poor answer? I agree that it is a poor answer, but what has even the most learned of critics to add? Let me again invoke Mr. Wackrill, who is a very good critic indeed. ‘It is’, he says, ‘the excellence of their design’, which ‘gives them a significance of their own’. And, in the last resort, his concept of vitality, which I censured above as a



## *The Chinese Exhibition*

red herring, resolves itself into 'a vitality proceeding from the artist's love of forms and colours in themselves'; in fact, it ceases to be 'vitality', and becomes an intuitive perception of certain formal relations which the artist has first experienced and then succeeded in reproducing in his work.

So much at least may, I think, be said with truth. I am conscious how little it is. Yet to say more, is to remove the discussion from the level at which I have sought to keep it, and to make off with it into the realm of metaphysical speculation. If once you begin to ask the question, why does this particular arrangement of lines and forms move us and not another, there is no answer this side of philosophy. My answer is, briefly, as follows—I only state it here, I have sought to defend it elsewhere. I believe, as Plato believed, that underlying the world of sense is another world, not itself sensuous. This non-sensory world, which Plato called reality, manifests itself, albeit obscurely, in the physical world which we know by means of our senses. Of this non-sensory world what we call Beauty is an inhabitant, and it is the manifestation of Beauty in the things which we know by means of our senses that is the source of that significance in them which evokes æsthetic appreciation in us.

### *Beauty and the Evolutionary Process*

It is, I conceive, the purpose of the development of living organisms, which we know as evolution, so to enlarge and refine the power of consciousness, that the knowledge of this world of reality may one day be vouchsafed to all creatures that possess consciousness, as a part of their normal experience. At our present level of evolutionary development the most that those of us, whose insight is average, can do is to discern the obscure and imperfect manifestations of Beauty in the material setting of works of art. But some who have climbed further up the ladder of evolutionary development than the rest can see a little farther. They discern, that is to say, in persons or things those significant relations of line and form which betoken the presence of Beauty. These are the artists. Nor is their activity limited to discernment, for reproducing in paint or sound or stone the significant combinations which have moved them, they enable us to participate, albeit vicariously and at second hand, in their own vision. For, although we cannot discern the formal relations in which Beauty is embodied as they lie hid in natural things, we can yet grasp



*The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

them when the artist has, as it were, made plain the way by throwing into high relief in his work of art what escapes our notice in nature. Thus art is representative, but its representation is not, except incidentally, of the sensible world. What it represents is the reality which underlies the sensible world. Art, in fact, is one of the windows, perhaps the clearest, at any rate the most accessible, through which ordinary men and women may get their first intimation of the nature of that reality, a complete knowledge of which is, if I am right, the goal at which evolution is aiming.

*Visitors to the Exhibition*

I hope that the profundity of the foregoing will not intimidate the reader. To use any and every occasion as a springboard from which to dive into the sea of metaphysics is the privilege of the philosopher, and, unless he gives an occasional exhibition of his powers, people begin to wonder whether there is anything in philosophy at all. After the virtuosity displayed in the last few pages any doubts they might have had in the matter will, I venture to think, be set at rest, for the display, after all, is rather unusual. It is unusual, that is to say, for a person to be moved by an exhibition of works of art to meditation on anything at all; more unusual still, for him to be moved to meditation on the universe. Having carefully listened to the comments of a very considerable number of people on the works here exhibited, I realize how unusual it is. Like mine, these comments have an interest all their own, and I propose to let the reader gently down from the heights we have just touched by retailing a few for his benefit.

The exhibition inevitably attracted a very heterogeneous collection of people. For a time it was all 'the rage'. Fashionable persons went to see and to be seen; students attended; lecturers discoursed to those who had come up from the provinces, while Chinese works of art were, it was obvious, considered to be the legitimate prey of girls' schools. (They were, among other things, so happily free from pictures of males and females in the nude.) My visits were mainly paid in the afternoons, when the crowd was largely composed of women. Rows of elderly ladies sat on the seats conversing resolutely about their acquaintances. Ladies still older yelled at one another through ear trumpets; female teachers instructed their circumambient flocks of girls; here and there embryo clergymen could be seen preparing

## *The Chinese Exhibition*

themselves for the task of converting Chinamen by inspecting the benighted products of their spiritual darkness. After all the creators of these works were not Christians; on the contrary, the Chinese are heathens, as everybody knows, and it is our business, therefore, to convert them.

### *Comments of the Visitors*

The comments of all these people were very various. Listening to them, it was borne in upon me how incurably mechanical is the turn of mind of the average product of our civilization. Our civilization—the theme is one to which I come back again and again—is interested in means, not in ends; in the way effects are produced rather than in the effects themselves. Confronted with these miracles of Chinese art, the reaction of most of the spectators was the schoolboy's reaction to the steam engine—'How does it work?' which, being translated, becomes 'How did they get their effects?'

People could be heard elaborately explaining to one another how the rich depths of colouring were produced by imposing one set of colours upon another. These vases of dull reds and greens were, in fact, coloured not once but twice. Or they were concerned over such matters as the properties of the mixture which must have been used to enable the colours to retain their freshness undimmed after so many centuries. 'How', they would ask, 'did they get their colours to last?' Clearly, there must have been some special process known to the Chinese whose secret we have lost. Lost, secret processes always make intriguing subjects of conversation.

Others speculated on the tools the Chinese used. With what instrument, for example, did they work in ivory? How did they chisel stone? With what kind of brushes did they make those delicate strokes on china and porcelain? How, lacking machines, did they manipulate the enormous masses of that statue? What craftsmen, what engineers, what masons or mechanics! But never, by any chance, what artists!

These comments, I concluded, were the expression of a definite incapacity for discussing and appreciating in these works of art what alone was meet for appreciation. We are so sunk in our preoccupation with mechanism that most of us have lost the capacity for appreciating Beauty. We can no longer think of things as ends in themselves; we can only think of the use to which they will be put.

## *The Author is Moved by and Reflects upon Beauty*

We see a beautifully-lidded jade pot. Are we moved by the exquisite grace of its line, delighted by the depth of its glowing colour or intrigued by the mystery of its formal beauty? We are not; we only wonder whether it will pour.

READER. Teapots, after all, are good for pouring out tea, and pouring out tea is good, because, when it is poured out, we are enabled to drink it, and drinking tea is good because the sensations it induces are pleasant sensations, and pleasant sensations . . .

AUTHOR. Are good for what?

READER. Pleasant sensations are good perhaps in and for themselves.

AUTHOR. But are there no pleasant sensations to be derived from seeing and enjoying a thing in its purely formal aspect as something which is beautiful in and for itself?

READER. Possibly.

AUTHOR. Then why this preoccupation of yours with a thing's usefulness as a means? You might, from the beginning, have concentrated on its beauty considered as an end.

READER. Don't nag.

When the works of art made the least concession to representationalism, the task of the commentator was, of course, easier. 'My dear, what a funny looking old man. I wonder, did they always look as queer as that? And just look at the peacock's feather in his hat.' 'What a quaint bridge. I'm sure it really couldn't have held itself up for two minutes.' 'Look at that pagoda though, with the trees round it. I wonder what the trees are. Willows, do you think?' 'Did they always build their houses by water, I wonder. It must have been rather fun sitting on that balcony overlooking the lake, and isn't that parrot a scream? Just like the clerk of the court in that Silly Symphony we saw—what was it called?' 'Who killed Cock Robin—'

Or there is, of course, the historical interest. Consulting the guide books in their hands, gentlemen inform their wives that this work is a product of the Han dynasty, that of the Sung. 'Just think of it, my dear, we were still in the middle of the Dark Ages.'

Or there is the frankly crude. 'I say, just look at the head of that bird. It's absolutely square, which reminds me that I saw a car with an absolutely square bonnet, as I was coming along. It was a Bentley; I think, and it must have been doing a good fifty. Not bad, though, for London!'

THE AUTHOR HAS HOPE OF THE FUTURE

---

*Welcome to Dr. Rhine*

When one is young, one's mind is no less impressionable than one's senses. Many hypotheses seem so attractive that the mind, unable to expel any, is forced for a time to retain several which are mutually incompatible. Thus at the age of twenty-one I flirted with Chesterton while legally wedded to Shaw, and derived æsthetic pleasure from the services of the High Anglican Church, when I was embarking on a career of hard boiled Rationalism. Even in early middle age I still found myself intermittently engaged in the erosion of authority, the while I was defending the imposition of a strict discipline upon my children.

The process of growing old is a process of simplification and solidification. The palate loses its appetite for experience, the mind for theories, and by late middle age one approaches the worlds both of thought and of sense enclosed within an ever-hardening framework of ready-made concepts. New facts are accepted, new experiences approved, according as they do or do not accommodate themselves within the framework. A good example of this fortification of the mind has been afforded by the effect produced upon mine by the apparent establishment by scientific methods of what Dr. Rhine calls extra-sensory perception. I do not reject Dr. Rhine's results; I accept them. What is more, I accept them gladly and uncritically, because they support, they lend countenance to, they fill in the outlines of, they accommodate themselves so cosily within, the framework of my vitalistic philosophy.

*His Experiments*

First, let me give a brief account of these results. Dr. Rhine has, it appears, been experimenting for a period of some three or four years on telepathy and clairvoyance, which he defines as follows: 'The

### *The Author has Hope of the Future*

perception of the thought or feelings of another (telepathy), or of an objective fact or relation (clairvoyance), without the aid of the known sensory processes.'

The experiments, which took place at Duke University in the United States, are in essence very simple. Packs of twenty-five cards were prepared, the cards being inscribed with geometrical diagrams such as a rectangle, a star, a plus sign and so on. There were five such diagrams, and each diagram appeared on five separate cards in each pack of twenty-five. The experiments consisted in asking the subject to name the order in which the cards were arranged in the pack. There were three variations. First, the subject named each card as it was removed face downwards from the pack. Secondly, he named the order of the cards as they lay face downwards in a pack on the table, no card being touched or moved. Thirdly, he named the order of the cards from the images present in the mind of another person who was looking at them. The first two were experiments in clairvoyance, the third in telepathy. During three years between ninety and a hundred thousand separate experiments were made. Now, it is easy to work out the number of correct guesses on a purely chance basis and so to arrive at the figure for the probable error in every twenty-five guesses. Most of the subjects experimented with gave answers which did not rise above this 'chance' figure. It presently became apparent, however, that some students were producing results which were considerably in excess of it. A group of about eight of these students was accordingly subjected to a prolonged and intensive series of experiments with surprising results.

For example, in the course of 2,250 witnessed trials in the first type of clairvoyant experiment a subject called 869 cards correctly. This is 419 above the chance figure and constitutes an average of 9·7 correct calls for each pack of twenty-five cards. Another subject returned an average of 14·7 correct calls for each pack of twenty-five cards over 300 different trials. There are, again, records of twenty-one correct calls out of twenty-five, even of twenty-five correct calls straight off the reel. In some of the experiments the caller was separated from the cards by a screen, in others by a wall and in others by a quadrangle, the caller being at one end of a long college building and the cards being turned in a room at the other. The telepathy experiments returned similar results. For example, over 3,400 trials an average of 11·0 correct calls per twenty-five cards was



## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

returned, the two people concerned in the experiment, that is to say, the mind reader and the person whose mind was being read, being situated in different rooms. More sensational were telepathic experiments in which the minds attached to two bodies separated by a distance of 250 miles managed to communicate with each other to the tune of an average of 10·1 correct calls per twenty-five cards.

### *Chance or Fraud?*

Now I do not wish to enter into a discussion of all the various explanations of these results that imagination might suggest or ingenuity devise. Chance, it is obvious, may be ruled out, since it is easy to work out by means of the theory of probability the number of correct guesses on a purely chance basis. Moreover, experiments on the same lines which have been conducted at the University of London Council for Psychical Investigation have produced results whose variations from the pure chance figure were negligible. Something more than chance was obviously at work in the Rhine experiments. Fraud is a bigger stumbling block. Here I can only refer the reader who is interested to the account contained in Dr. Rhine's book *Extra-Sensory Perception* of the elaborate methods which were taken to preclude it. The gravest objection to the fraud hypothesis is to my mind psychological. Is it really credible that half a dozen members of a University staff working with a constantly changing group of students would have been content to conduct a series of what must have been exceedingly monotonous and tiring experiments lasting for more than three years with no other object than that of making fools of one another? Is it further credible that, if this were indeed the case, nobody would have given the game away? Dr. Rhine's book has been widely read: yet, so far as I know, no one of those engaged in carrying out the experiments has been found to cast serious doubts on the *bona fides* of the author. There are, of course various other possibilities; for example, the possibility of rational inference. By means of reasoning, it may be said, the subject might determine which was the diagram on the top card of the pack. Or there is hyperæsthesia on the part of some one or other of the known senses. A subject might discern faint indications on the backs of the cards not perceptible by persons of normal sensibility, or even hear faint whisperings on the part of the person looking at the cards. But, apart from the complete lack of evidence for any such abnormal

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

sensibility, it is difficult to see how it could have operated when the parties were separated by screens, walls and buildings.

Again, one might discuss possible applications of this extra-sensory faculty, supposing it to exist. Can it, for example, be developed and used for healing purposes or for crime detection, the person gifted with the faculty being called in to read telepathically the images passing through the mind of a suspected murderer? .

Inevitably, my interest is mainly with the philosophical implication of these experiments. Let us suppose for a moment that we take the facts at their face value, and proceed to assume that a faculty which we will call that of extra-sensory perception does in fact crop up here and there in otherwise ordinary individuals. What light would this supposition and this assumption throw upon the nature of human personality? Or rather, for my immediate concern is with the function and status of human beings in the scheme of things rather than with their nature—what light would they throw upon the purpose and destiny of life in general and of human life in particular?

### *Life Secures a Foothold in Matter*

Let us suppose that we adopt the view of the evolutionary process with which Shaw's writings have made us familiar, the view commonly known as Creative Evolution.

Life, we shall conceive, as being at first unconscious, or rather as possessing only that degree of or capacity for consciousness which would, presumably, be necessary for the development of consciousness proper. One may put this by saying that life is initially unconscious in every respect, except in respect of its striving to grow to consciousness. To assist it in this endeavour, it must fashion instruments for itself, and the only material which it can find to its hand is matter, which has reached the stage of development at which life can mould and make use of it. Everything, I suggest, goes to show that the development of life is not a passive process set going by the impact of changing material conditions upon living organisms. It is rather in the nature of an attack by life upon matter, whereby life seeks, as it were, to insinuate itself through the chinks in the armour of matter. It is only to-day that we are discovering how unlikely some of these chinks are. It has recently been found, for example, that fungus spores can swim and breathe after they have been frozen in

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

liquid helium ; an American biologist claims to have discovered living germs inside a meteorite ; many kinds of bacteria have been picked up by aeroplanes flying several miles high. Reflecting upon these and similar facts, one gets an impression of life as an activity trying ever to invade fresh territories, to snatch a new foothold in the alien stuff of the world, as it carries on its eternal struggle against Chaos and Old Night.

The result of life's impact upon and employment of matter is a living organism. Living organisms may, then, be regarded as life's contrivances to further its own development in the direction of the achievement of fuller and more intense consciousness.

### *Development of Living Organisms*

How is this development effected? One may discern three stages. There is, first, the conscious striving to achieve a new power or faculty. There is, secondly, its acquisition. There is, thirdly, its relegation to the unconscious part of our natures, so that it may thereafter be exercised and its benefits enjoyed without the intervention of consciousness. Achieved with difficulty, and, at first, precariously maintained, vital accomplishments are developed by use into habits. Having reached the stage of 'habits', their performance becomes unconscious, and the habit, stamped into the vital inheritance of the species, appears in the next generation as an instinct. Originally, we may suppose, we had consciously to attend to such primitive physiological processes as the growing of our hair and nails and the circulation of our blood. When our ancestors had performed these operations sufficiently often through a sufficiently large number of successive generations, they grew so used to performing them that presently they could manage to do them without thinking. As with physical, so with mental acquisitions. A mathematician in the Middle Ages performed with the greatest difficulty the arithmetical operations involved in the calculation of accounts, which a child of average ability in a contemporary primary school takes in his stride as an exercise in simple mental arithmetic. The incredulity aroused by the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo was not entirely due to Catholic obscurantism. Even those who were convinced by the demonstration that the earth was not the centre of the heavens and that the sun was not a small yellow ball that rotated round it, found the greatest difficulty in compassing the imaginative reconstruction

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

of the universe which the acceptance of the results of the demonstration entailed. They simply could not visualize the earth as a smallish planet attendant upon a prodigiously larger sun. We experience a similar imaginative difficulty in picturing to ourselves the sort of universe which is affirmed by the theory of relativity. If the past history of mental acquisitions by the human race is any guide, our descendants two hundred years hence will find it no harder to conceive the universe of Einstein than we find it to conceive the universe of Newton.

### *A Formula for Progress*

The evolutionary significance of this process is obvious. Every advance in skill, every acquisition of an accomplishment, every mastery of a new process, every establishment of a new faculty, sets free vital energy for the making of further gains. It is because we have learnt to perform our bodily functions without thinking about them, that our minds have the energy and leisure for the conquest of new modes of activity. What I am suggesting, in fact, is a formula for the evolutionary process. Life evolves new powers and acquires new faculties by transferring to the sphere of unconscious performance old ones which have been won so long, exercised so often and learnt so well that they no longer demand our conscious attention.

How are the new acquisitions made? Sometimes, consciously, by a process of trial and error set going by the force of will animated by imaginative desire. We imaginatively conceive; we will what we imagine; we make efforts to perform what we will and, suddenly, we succeed. Thus our remote ancestor, who, disdainful of the natural mode of progression on a tail and four legs, descended from the trees and achieved a precarious eminence on two, may be supposed to have imagined and willed this novel method of perambulation, before he attempted it. And, quite suddenly, after numberless ineffectual efforts, I picture him succeeding. The suddenness, the almost disconcerting suddenness, of success when it comes is a characteristic of the process. For hours, sometimes for days, we strove as children to ride our bicycles; for days, sometimes for weeks, we strove on skates for an outside edge. For hours, for days, for weeks even, we seemed to make no progress. And then, suddenly, we did it. Suddenly we acquired a new faculty of balance, and, in so far as we did it, we did it perfectly. The balance might be intermittently acquired and

## *The Author, has Hope of the Future*

precariously maintained. But, for so long as it lasted, it was a perfect balance.

### *Their Unexpected Appearances*

But conscious striving on the part of the organisms does not appear to be always necessary to the evolution of the new power or faculty. Sometimes the mere drive of the evolutionary process seems to be sufficient. It seems unlikely that any creature ever imagined or willed to possess so complex a sense organ as an eye or an ear; and such faculties as mathematical ability, virtuosity at chess, or a good eye at games crop up in fortunate individuals unsought. It is as if life, having laid up a sufficient reserve of already existing faculty, were venturing upon a course of trial and experiment in search of a new one. And a new one accordingly appears, at first in a few exceptional individuals, then, if it turns out to be a success, in more and more, until it finally establishes itself as part of our evolutionary endowment. This brings me back to extra-sensory perception.

Everybody will remember in Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* the sudden and totally unexpected development in a few ordinary individuals of the faculty of living longer. It is, Shaw surmises, an outrage from the evolutionary point of view that people should die just when they had acquired enough wisdom to enable them to live intelligently. Longer life being needed, if the consciousness of the race is to advance, the evolutionary process in due course evolves individuals with the capacity for living it.

### *The Need for Telepathy*

It is precisely in this light that I should be disposed to regard the faculty of extra-sensory perception which Dr. Rhine believes himself to have demonstrated. Consider that form of extra-sensory perception which is commonly called telepathy. How urgently, from the evolutionary point of view, it is needed! It is, when we come to reflect upon it, a fact no less astonishing than it is humiliating, that the only way in which we can normally obtain any knowledge of what is passing in other people's minds is via an inference from the behaviour of their bodies, an inference, moreover, which must depend for its plausibility upon an often misleading analogy. We have, in ordinary experience, no direct knowledge of any mind other than our own. Why is it, for example, that I suppose you to have a mind?



## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

You are standing, we will suppose, under an apple tree. I observe that your arm lifts itself into the air, that the fingers of your hand extend and encircle an apple. The arm is then lowered and as a result the apple is dragged from the tree. The arm is then lifted again in such a way that the apple is brought near to your mouth. This opens leaving a hole into which part of the surface of the apple disappears. When the apple is presently withdrawn some of it is missing. These and similar movements are what I observe, and they are *all* that I observe. Now, I know that I frequently act in a similar way and I know, further, that, when I do so, my actions are the results of certain events which have been going on in my mind which produce the actions. I *see* the apple. I *want* to eat it and I accordingly *decide* to pluck it. When, therefore, I see another body very like mine going through the movements which I perform when I see, I want and I decide, I infer that they too are produced by certain events which I describe as *You see, you want, you decide*, and the occurrence of these events seems to presuppose the existence of a mind in which they occur. I infer, therefore, that you have a mind and that in this mind there occurs a desire for the apple. Similarly, I deduce a person's anger from the flushing of his face, the flashing of his eyes, the raising of his voice; a person's love from other facial movements which it should be unnecessary to specify; and, if it be said that it is the words which people use which really convince me that they are angry or that they are in love, I am compelled to recognize that even words are only movements in the larynxes of the people uttering them, movements which set going waves in the atmosphere which, in due course, impinge on my eardrums and cause me to hear sounds.

But what a clumsy, what a roundabout procedure! To what mistakes does it give rise? What feats of insincerity and hypocrisy does it encourage?

Clearly, direct knowledge of other people's minds is a power which life has an urgent incentive to evolve. Like the capacity for living longer, it is something which life's most advanced representatives are, given the truth of the hypothesis of creative evolution, almost bound sooner or later to manifest. And this, I suggest, is the most plausible interpretation of the facts which Dr. Rhine's experiments have revealed. Extra-sensory perception bears all the marks of a newly acquired faculty. It is, for example, intermittent and precarious. Let the subject be fatigued, let him be excited, let him take

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

certain drugs, let him be placed in novel circumstances, and immediately the percentage of correct guesses begins to drop. The faculty, again, is easily put out of action. For this reason, if Dr. Rhine's subjects were brought before a committee of sceptically-minded experts, they would, as he himself freely admits, probably acquit themselves with so little credit that their scores would drop to the figure required by pure chance.

### *Sudden Appearance of Telepathy*

A significant, even a sinister fact? Possibly! It all depends on your view of the experiments as a whole. But, on the hypothesis which I am suggesting, it is a perfectly plausible fact. Pavlov's dogs, it will be remembered, lost most of their acquired reflexes when some distracting object, for example a stranger, entered the room, and salivated promiscuously to any and every stimulus, or salivated not at all. Again, the faculty functions only when the subject is in good health and serene mind, a fact which prompts the question: Why should not a man *guess* as well when he is ill, as when he is healthy? Assuming, however, that we have agreed to rule out the fraud and the chance hypotheses, the fact becomes entirely plausible on the assumption that the extra-sensory faculty is a new vital acquisition, as yet rare and precarious, and that, to manifest it, the subject must be at the top of his form. Again, when it does appear, it does so suddenly, capriciously and surprisingly. Just as you may try for hours when skating to do an outside edge, and then suddenly and surprisingly do it, so after long spells of comparatively blank calling, the subjects suddenly begin to return high percentages; and just as, in the skating instance, the effort involved in the unsuccessful trials is far greater than that expended in the successful achievement—the outside edge, when we do at last do it, seems surprisingly effortless and easy—so the strain felt in comparatively unsuccessful calling was less than that involved when high percentage returns were rendered.

Finally the two faculties, the clairvoyant and the telepathic, were often found to go together. Those who exhibited the one exhibited also the other; those who at any given moment were doing well with the one were also found to be doing well with the other; temporary loss of the one accompanied a corresponding loss of the other.

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

### *Telepathy only in Advanced Organisms*

There is a fairly widespread presumption that telepathy occurs more frequently among organisms less highly developed than ourselves. It is said—the assertion, explicit or implied, pervades current literature—that our intellects are so over-developed that our other faculties have tended to atrophy. Hence philosophers like Bergson and novelists like D. H. Lawrence bid us look askance at the processes of the intellect and to value what is vaguely known as intuition. Stop thinking, they seem to say, and there will be restored to you that intuitive sympathy, that heightened sensory power, that feeling of being at one with nature and your fellow beings, that ineffable conviction of harmony that belongs of right to the children of nature, to birds, to beasts and to savages.

That intuitive sympathy exists between birds, for example, in a highly developed degree of which we have little conception, I do not wish to deny. Savages also have modes of communication which are inaccessible to us. But such evidence as can be gathered on the subject seems to suggest that both in birds and in savages these are modes of *sensory* perception. It is sensory perception developed in a very high degree that seems the most likely explanation of the homing and migration of birds. It is because his eyes can discern faint indications of leaf and twig, of face and form, which are beyond the range of our vision, his ears catch faint sounds which are inaudible to our duller sense, that the savage is capable of his sometimes astonishing feats of divination and communication.

Now it seems to be fairly clear that the faculty to whose existence Dr. Rhine's experiments point is not a sensory faculty at all. The cards were often called by subjects who did not even look at the back. Sometimes the eyes of the subject were closed and his head turned away; sometimes he was in another room. The ordinary senses, moreover, seemed in general to be in abeyance. That the attention of the subject had to be concentrated, I have already mentioned; but the concentration was of the mind, rather than of the senses. Directly the ordinary senses were brought into play, as for example, when somebody entered the room, the percentage of correct calls began to drop. The inference seems to be that the processes which are involved are not sensory but mental. It is the mind which is active in extra-sensory perception just as it is the mind which is active in mental arithmetic. What, then, the experiments seem to establish is, in Dr.

## *The Author has Hope of the Future*

Rhine's own words, 'the relatively independent agency of mind under certain conditions of the sensory world.' Now there are good grounds for the view that sensory perception appears earlier than thinking in the history of the organisms whose development constitutes what we know as the evolutionary process. If thinking is interpreted strictly to mean the abstract ratiocinative processes of the intellect, it is probable that only human beings can think, and even with us the functioning of the senses inhibits the activity of the mind. If, then, telepathy and clairvoyance are mental rather than sensory functions, one would expect them to manifest themselves as functions only of highly developed minds. Take the latest product of evolution, life's most lately and most highly evolved contrivance for furthering its own development, the human mind, and it constitutes, it is obvious, the most likely soil for the manifestation of a new vital faculty. On this view, it is no accident that Dr. Rhine's telepathic and clairvoyant students should have been people of good, though not necessarily of exceptional, intellectual attainments.

### *Leaving the Sensory World Behind*

My suggestion is, then, that the emergence of this faculty is an indication of the achievement of a new level of evolutionary advance. Just as the faculty of thinking appeared at first intermittently and precariously in a few exceptionally gifted individuals, and subsequently became general in our species, so may the faculty of perceiving without the aid of the senses by means of minds which can transcend space, a faculty which is at present new and rare, become one day a more or less general possession of our species. For it is, I further suggest, being evolved in response to the clear need of living creatures to possess it. The suggestion, it is obvious, owes much to Shaw. Shaw I believe to be fundamentally right, when he represents living organisms as the unconscious instruments of a vital impulsion developing through trial and error those characteristics of which life has need in the furtherance of its own progress to the achievement of an ever more intense consciousness. But he seems to have erred in identifying with longer living the next stage in the evolutionary advance. It appears, if we may trust Dr. Rhine's experiments, to lie rather in the acquisition of non-sensory perception.

Non-sensory perception is the first rung of the ladder which leads out of the realm of sensory experience altogether. Already our senses

### *The Author has Hope of the Future*

grow duller as the occasions for their use diminish. One day, we may surmise, consciousness will take the form of pure knowledge, knowledge which will proceed to the exploration of the universe without the aid of the senses.

Pure speculation? Of course it is. But it is not speculation in a vacuum. It is, rather, speculation within a framework, the framework of ready-made hypothesis into which, as the mind grows older, it must fit all the knowledge and experience that comes its way, ignoring whatever fails to accommodate itself. What I have said will perhaps serve to indicate the outline of my framework, and how conveniently the results of a piece of original experimental psychology fit into its pre-existing structure. The fit is, I submit, perfect. But then, if they had not fitted, I should not have been disposed to attach importance to them.